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Welcome

Hey guys! So I'm back with another fan-fiction (again). I was kinda getting bored with not writing anymore stories so I decided to post another story - a couple of you guys wanted me to do Fireheart & Cinderpelt/Sandstorm and at first I was wondering what kind of story plot I could do for them. (@TheOutsidersAngel first gave me this idea :)). I was thinking more of a Bluestar & Oakheart/Thrushpelt story, but after a few days, ideas started flowing in for Fireheart's one and I'm actually really excited about this :)

So as most of you guys know, I have two other Warriors fan-fiction:

Firestar & Sandstorm/Spottedleaf and Jayfeather & Half Moon/ Briarlight

If you haven't checked it out yet, and wish to, it's on my profile :)

*****

Story Plot:

Fireheart never knew Cinderpelt liked him, but she did. She liked him the moment she became his apprentice.

Fireheart's always been drawn to Sandstorm, her brilliant green eyes and fiery spirit. And yet memories of him and his past love Spottedleaf still tags around in his mind...

*****

The first part of this story is basically set during the days when Cinderpelt was still an apprentice and Spottedleaf was already murdered by Clawface. Fireheart isn't leader yet, and Tigerstar (known as Tigerclaw back then) was still living and the

deputy. Bluestar is the current leader of ThunderClan and ya let's take it from there :)

****I wrote Sandstorm as a warrior already - but in the real timeline, she isn't a warrior yet, she's still an apprentice. So that's why her name is Sandstorm in the following chapters and not Sandpaw, just in case any of you guys get confused XD****

Hope you guys enjoy this story :) If there are slow updates, please forgive me as I may be quite busy with other things or is still in the middle of writing. I'd rather do work properly and not rush it so that it doesn't become a messy story for you guys.

I'm open to constructive criticism and a little pointer here and there if I get character's names wrong or stuff like that (people do make mistakes sometimes and I'm no exception haha).

PS: The drawings on the cover of this book are NOT drawn by me, credits go to the people who made it! :)

~Jayhow

1

Fireheart stretched in a leisurely manner, padding out of his den. The sun stroked his coat, turning his fur a blazing orange. "Cinderpaw!" He called, looking around for his apprentice.

She ran out of the apprentice den, eyes sparkling in excitement. "I'm here, Fireheart! What are we doing today?"

He purred, flicking his tail over her ear, amused at her excitement. "We're going to go hunting." As Cinderpaw bounced off ahead of him, he shook his head, still marvelling at how different she was from Brackenpaw. Her brother was obviously more calm and collected than her.

As they padded into a shady area, Fireheart looked around. Finally he spotted a fern for Cinderpaw to practice on. "Show me your hunting crouch," he ordered as he sat down, curling his tail over his paws as he overlooked Cinderpaw's crouch. "Cinderpaw, your tail's moving too much. At least raise it above the ground so you don't disturb the leaves underneath."

Cinderpaw paused, focusing on her tail. It eventually stopped moving. Looking up, she gave him a slightly embarrassed but still excited look. "Sorry, Fireheart."

"Let's work on your pounce." He nodded to the fern.

Cinderpaw could barely feel her paws, but she forced herself to keep walking anyway. Mouth-watering scents wafted to her nose as she smelt the prey she carried in her mouth. Today had been a successful hunt.

These past few days being Fireheart's apprentice had been a dream

come true. She deeply admired him and - wait, was that feelings she felt for him?

Cinderpaw shook her head, trying to push away these uncomfortable thoughts. What was wrong with her?

Fireheart turned to face Cinderpaw at the camp entrance. His eyes sparkled fondly down at her, and she couldn't help but feel her heart leap in excitement. "Good job today, Cinderpaw. We'll learn more battle moves tomorrow."

Cinderpaw nodded eagerly, speaking past the prey in her mouth, "Thanks!" She was about to ask another question or two, gathering her courage so as to keep the conversation moving when Sandstorm bounded past.

"Fireheart! Let's share this mouse I caught. It's really juicy," Sandstorm mewed, dropping the mouse she carried in her mouth.

Cinderpaw could see surprise flashing in Fireheart's eyes. Sandstorm didn't usually treat him like this. He purred and nodded, joining her as she walked into camp, leaving Cinderpaw behind.

Cinderpaw sighed and continued walking in alone.

Fireheart was captured by the flame burning in Sandstorm's green eyes. She was... different from last time. He could see her vibrancy, her life.

As she tore into the mouse, chatting about random things, he realised just how much more friendly she actually was. He twitched his ears, stopping his thoughts before it could progress even further. He tried tuning in to what she was trying to say, but all he could do was stare into those deep, beautiful green eyes.

Sandstorm blinked. "Hello? Fireheart?"

"Uh-yea?" Fireheart shook himself out of his reverie and hurriedly bit into the mouse.

Sandstorm stared at him for a moment. "Did you hear a word of what I just said?"

"Um... yea? I guess?" Fireheart mumbled, swallowing his mouse down a little too quickly in alarm. Was she going to lose her temper? Was she about to lash out at him? Was she mad? Was she-

She broke into a purr, swatting her paw over his ear. "You obviously are not a very bright cat, are you?" Her eyes sparkled with amusement, and he was once again drawn into those deep green pools. "Hey, don't go all dreamy on me again." Sandstorm stretched, standing up.

Fireheart yawned, finishing off the last of the mouse. "I'm really tired, I'll go to the warriors den first."

Sandstorm nodded. "Have a good rest," she mewed as she padded off.

Yea, I need to sort out my thoughts of you. Fireheart thought as he padded into the warriors den. Sighing, he curled up. *Spottedleaf... are you in StarClan now? I don't know what I'm feeling...*

Cinderpaw lay in the apprentice's den, facing the ceiling where she could just about manage to see the night stars twinkling overhead. *Fireheart... will you ever notice me?*

Author's Note:

First chapter of the story is up :) what do you guys think?

Do you guys ship Cinderpaw and Fireheart or Fireheart and Sandstorm?

Ahh I'm excited for this story, let's see how this turns out haha :)) Ho pe you guys enjoyed this and look out for more chapters!!

See ya,

~Jayhow

2

Cinderpaw breathed in the smell of fresh air, shivering in the coldness of morning dew as they dripped onto her pelt as she brushed past leaves. Fireheart was following closely behind, watching her progress as she sniffed the air for prey.

I must do well for Fireheart. She thought, determined. Before she could question why this meant so much more than him just being a mentor, she caught the scent of a squirrel. Cinderpaw could almost jump with joy.

"If you don't become less jumpy, all prey in the forest would be scared off." Fireheart commented, amused as he watched her antics.

Embarrassed, she shuffled her paws, looking down at them. "Sorry," she mumbled.

"Continue with the hunt. When it's sunset, return back to camp."

Cinderpaw blinked in surprise. "We're not going to be doing anything else?"

Fireheart shook his head, turning away. But Cinderpaw, after overcoming her excitement, could see the weariness in Fireheart's paws as he padded slowly away. *Is something wrong with him? Does he need help?* Cinderpaw was about to open her mouth and ask, but realised that it would be too probing.

Trying to shove it from her mind, she continued to hunt. But she couldn't stop thinking about him. *I think I should give him something to make him feel better...* Cinderpaw paused, thinking. *But what?*

Hmm... maybe it's just best to talk to him. Everyone likes a shoulder to lie on. Cinderpaw pricked her ears, glad she could do something at last. Her young and naive heart leaped as she searched around for him.

"Fireheart?" Cinderpaw padded around, calling as she went. She didn't see why she couldn't call, it was a faster way to locate someone. "Firehea-"

"Fireheart, you shouldn't keep thinking about her. She's in StarClan. What happened cannot be changed."

Cinderpaw paused, her heart suddenly dropping to the bottom of her stomach like a cold stone. Sandstorm's biting voice sliced through her dreamy thoughts, silencing all possible scenarios between the young apprentice and mentor.

"But..."

Cinderpaw ducked behind a clump of bushes, peering out warily at the two cats. They were talking quietly in a patch of sunlight, Fireheart looking uncertain and sad. "I still think it's my fault. If only I was there in time..."

"Fireheart." Sandstorm snapped. Cinderpaw winced, wondering who they were talking about. "Come to your senses. It wasn't your fault, okay? It was her own decision to stand in that exact same spot, at that exact same time."

When Fireheart still kept quiet, Sandstorm leaned forward to search his eyes to detect his emotions. When she did, she stepped back. "Do you... do you like Spottedleaf?"

"What?" Fireheart asked, his eyes searching Sandstorm's as well. Then his gaze slipped. "I-I don't know," he muttered.

Cinderpaw could sense a shift in Sandstorm's emotions, and something in her eyes flickered, but was immediately replaced with her same old stony expression. Old Sandstorm was back.

"When you're done sorting out your emotions, come talk to me again." Sandstorm abruptly stood up and without looking back, left.

Cinderpaw immediately felt sympathy for Fireheart. Sandstorm had no reason to act the way she did. Fireheart was probably only asking for her opinion. Fireheart was shaking his head, standing up

on shaky paws. Cinderpaw rushed out of the undergrowth, giving him her shoulder for support. "Fireheart? Are you alright?"

Fireheart nodded his head tiredly, then suddenly jerked up as he saw who he was talking to. "Cinderpaw? What are you doing here? Did you- did you hear what me and Sandstorm were talking about?"

"I-uh," Cinderpaw swallowed. She couldn't lie to her mentor. Abashed, she nodded silently.

Fireheart sighed. "Cinderpaw..."

"I'm sorry, Fireheart. I really am. I didn't mean to, I just thought that I could help you, but then I stumbled into your conversation."

"It's okay, Cinderpaw. But next time, please don't do that again." He licked his paws, drawing it over his ears to give them a quick wash, quickly regaining back his energy.

"Do you want to go hunting with me?" Cinderpaw asked, a little timidly.

Fireheart looked at her, slightly surprised. "I've never heard an apprentice saying that to a mentor before," he chuckled.

Cinderpaw purred. "Well, I'll be the first one."

They didn't talk about the conversation with Sandstorm anymore, but Cinderpaw still felt curious. Fireheart kept silent in most of the hunt, thinking. Cinderpaw wondered what he was thinking about, and whether one day he would ever share those thoughts with her.

Author's Note:

Hehe hey guys!! Back with a new chapter :) What do you guys think of this? Fireheart's thinking about Spottedleaf again >.< , Sandstorm seems to be a little jealous ;) and Cinderpaw's still wondering...

Sorry if I don't update frequently, exams and pending work are my enemies.

Hope you guys liked this chapter!! <3

See ya,

~Jayhow

3

Sandstorm tore at the mouse at her paws, frustrated. Why was she so easily affected by him? *Well, maybe because you're starting to like him.* Sandstorm tried to shake off those thoughts, but she couldn't help but think back to the time that he had saved her - the time she first started to like him.

She stood up, shaking her head to try to clear her thoughts. Flicking her tail from side to side, she stared irritably at the mouse she had just shredded. *Great, now this is inedible just because I was thinking too much of* him. *Why did I have to be so rash and scold him like that? He was probably feeling so lost right now...*

Sandstorm glanced back to where she knew Fireheart was still standing, confused and sad. Her heart ached for him.

But he likes Spottedleaf, Sandstorm thought to herself. Sighing, she picked up the remains of the mouse and started padding back to camp.

As she entered the camp entrance, Bluestar headed over to her. The leader of ThunderClan glanced once at the shredded mouse and stared at her with a 'what-happened' expression on her face.

Sandstorm dipped her head in respect for Bluestar, but avoided the question as she headed for the fresh-kill pile. Bluestar followed, "Sandstorm, I want you to lead a patrol out to the WindClan borders. Tigerclaw has been scenting them over on our side of the border."

Sandstorm lay the mouse on the fresh-kill pile, then nodded at Bluestar. "Alright." She tried not to look for Fireheart as she scanned the camp for cats to bring on the patrol, but obviously she failed. Fireheart met her gaze steadily.

Mouse dung, why does he always have to look so... Wait, is he walking towards me?

He was.

Great. I'm such a mouse-brain, why couldn't I look elsewhere? Why do I always find myself searching for him? Sandstorm silently scolded herself as she looked down at her paws. *See? This is what happens when you...*

"I'll come with you." Fireheart's deep voice that Sandstorm had come to love washed over her, effectively cutting off her thoughts. She looked up, trying not to meet his gaze as she searched the camp for more cats to join their patrol before it became too awkward.

She didn't want him to know how much his comment that he liked Spottedleaf had affected her so much.

"Willowpelt and Mousefur," Sandstorm called. The two warriors looked up from sharing tongues, then joined Sandstorm as she headed for the entrance to camp rather hastily. She couldn't concentrate with Fireheart standing so close to her.

As they headed to the WindClan border, Fireheart kept pace with her. "I'm sorry," he murmured under his breath, but Sandstorm didn't want to hear it.

She pulled on, not caring much about the patrol she was leaving behind. The thick undergrowth was slowly becoming lesser as she neared WindClan territory. She pushed herself on faster, thinking there was nothing further but clear land.

Her eyes widened as she finally saw what was ahead of her. Skidding to a stop at the edge of a gorge, she took a deep, shaky breath as she saw just how close her death had been. Memories flashed across her mind, *Fireheart standing over her, worried for her as he dragged her away from the edge of the gorge - saving her life.*

Closing her eyes, she sensed rather than saw Fireheart come to stand beside her.

"You almost fell down again," Fireheart gazed out over the gorge, not meeting her gaze. Sandstorm looked at him.

"I know what I'm doing. I wasn't going to fall." Sandstorm snapped,

but her heart accelerated at the sight of his deep green gaze and how close she was to him.

"But even if you did, I wouldn't let you." Fireheart continued, finally turning to meet her gaze. Sandstorm's breath hitched. *What did he just say?* "I won't lose you."

Sandstorm looked away, not knowing what to say. For once in her life she was speechless.

"Remember when I saved you from falling down a gorge like this one?" Fireheart whispered.

Sandstorm didn't know where Willowpelt or Mousefur was - they probably knew to leave the two cats alone to have their moment. Sandstorm was both mad but grateful at the same time. "I don't owe you anything," Sandstorm grumbled, finding her voice.

Fireheart purred, amused at her festiness. "I know."

Sandstorm took a deep breath. *Might as well get this off my chest.* "Sorry for getting mad at you when you first saved me."

She still remembered very vividly when she had lashed out at Fireheart, saying that she could fight her own battles. But then she saw Whiteclaw - the memory still haunted her - fall of the edge. Realisation of how close to death she had come still sent shivers down her spine.

Fireheart gently laid his tail over her shoulders, a little cautiously so that she could pull away if she felt uncomfortable. But she didn't. "And... I'm sorry for arguing with you just now."

She felt Fireheart stiffen. *Must be thinking of Spottedleaf,* Sandstorm thought a little sourly. "It's okay, Sandstorm. I-I shouldn't have been thinking of Spottedleaf anyway."

Sandstorm was about to reply when Mousefur's sharp tongue cut through the moment. "Are you guys going to sit there all day or are you going to actually help us mark our territory before those fleabags become more daring and cross the border again?"

Both cats purred. "Sorry Mousefur," Fireheart dipped his head as he stood up and led the way back to the border.

***

Cinderpaw stared wide-eyed as Tigerclaw slashed Darkstripe's cheek, spraying blood all around the forest floor. "I ask for your loyalty, yet you cannot give any." Tigerclaw snarled at the dark warrior, who flinched under Tigerclaw's words.

"I can promise to do better, Tigerclaw. I-"

"Excuses," Tigerclaw snapped. "But I'll give you another chance. Finish the job I gave you. If you don't carry it out as I planned, I *will* make sure you suffer."

Cinderpaw looked around, trying to see an escape route. *Where was Fireheart?* Her mind immediately raced back to her mentor as she felt fear riding up in her. He was the one she trusted to protect her, to protect the Clan. Where was he? Tigerclaw was pure evil, he-

"Cinderpaw?"

The young apprentice froze. Her pale blue eyes swung up to meet his pale amber ones. Tigerclaw leered down at her, curling his lips to reveal his sharp teeth. "Are you scared, little one?"

Cinderpaw gulped, looking at Darkstripe. Then she shook her head, shivering slightly.

Tigerclaw purred, his tail stroking her cheek as he leaned down to her level. "Embrace that fear, Cinderpaw. One day, when you become powerful, you'll have no fear at all. Would you like to become powerful?"

Cinderpaw shook her head. Tigerclaw snarled, raising his paw to strike her.

"Leave me alone!" Cinderpaw cried, rearing on her two back legs.

Tigerclaw shoved her down, crushing her underneath his heavy weight. "Embrace your fear, Cinderpaw. Embrace your destiny. I

called you here to witness me torturing Darkstripe to make you become more powerful, Cinderpaw. I want you to *aid* me."

"Aid you?" Cinderpaw whimpered. She had only just become an apprentice, how could she help such a powerful warrior? "How?"

Tigerclaw leaned forward, whispering in her ear while a malicious grin was plastered on his face. The sight was enough to scare an experienced warrior back to the nursery.

"*Kill Bluestar.*"

Author's Note:

Hey guys!!

Whoops sorry for not updating hehe, but anyway here it is :) I'm so mad Fireheart wasn't there for Cinderpaw :(but at the same time Fireheart and Sandstorm had their moment.. ;)

ANDDD the Tigerclaw picture I attached right at the top is so cool! It's not mine though :') I found it on Pinterest, so all credit goes to the person who drew it :)

Hope you guys enjoyed it, I had to research a lot more about the old Warriors books because I kind of forgot the details hehe :P so that was another reason for the long wait :(But anyways I managed to come up with this! :)

Thanks for all the support guys <3 You all really make my day :))

See ya!

~Jayhow

4

[image]

Sandstorm padded into camp, a rabbit clamped in between her jaws as she looked around for Fireheart, ready to share the victory of her hunt with him. But instead Dustpelt came to meet her, a look in his eyes that somewhat unsettled Sandstorm.

"Dustpelt? Have you seen Fireheart?"

"Sandstorm." Dustpelt greeted in a curt manner, ignoring the other question. She frowned.

"Is there something wrong?" She asked, dropping the rabbit onto the fresh-kill pile, turning to face him properly.

He continued to look at her for a while without saying anything, then cocked his head to one side, studying her. "You've changed since you met Fireheart."

"What?" Sandstorm looked at him, slightly offended. "Dustpelt, snap out of it. I haven't changed - not for anyone, and certainly not by him."

"Really? Then explain to me why you've been looking at me like you don't know me - like we're not best friends. And explain to me why you *always* look for Fireheart. He's a *kittypet* for StarClan's sake." Dustpelt snarled.

Sandstorm narrowed her eyes. "Dustpelt, you're still my best friend. And Fireheart's just my Clanmate. I don't see anything wrong with being a kittypet either, as long as he has the heart of a warrior, it doesn't matter."

Dustpelt dug his claws into the ground. "Maybe he's becoming *more* than a Clanmate." Jealousy flashed through his eyes. "We used to hate him - both of us, united together. But what happened, Sandstorm?" Disgust flitted across his eyes for a moment before he

stalked away without waiting for an answer.

Sandstorm felt a stab of sadness as she watched her best friend walk away in anger. Like he was abandoning her. But deep inside, she knew he was right. Unwanted feelings for Fireheart was already forming.

Sighing, Sandstorm headed for the camp entrance to go on another hunt, wanting to clear her mind when her gaze met Tigerclaw's. His amber eyes were thoughtful, as though he were plotting something. No doubt he had heard the whole exchange.

Shivering in an invisibly cold wind, Sandstorm left quickly, breaking their gaze.

***

Fireheart purred, flicking his tail over Cinderpaw's ear. "Don't be silly, Cinderpaw. There *are* no blue squirrels in the forest."

"It may be possible, you just haven't seen it yet." Cinderpaw purred in amusement, bumping against her mentor's shoulder playfully. "You haven't seen many things."

Fireheart pretended to look insulted. "Like *you* have."

"Besides, if Bluestar can be a blue-gray colour, why can't squirrels?"

Graystripe rolled his eyes. "Can we just finish the patrol? It'll soon be sunset if we continue at this pace." He bounded ahead, but when Cinderpaw caught sight of the frozen river, she sprinted on ahead of him, letting out a squeal in excitement.

Brackenpaw, Fireheart, and Graystripe ran after her, stopping right at the edge. Brackenpaw gaped in awe at the frozen iciness of the river. Cautiously he laid a paw on the river, but it gave off an eerie creaking sound that made him draw his paw back rather hastily. "Coward," Cinderpaw teased.

Graystripe pricked his ears at the sound of scuffling. "A vole!"

Fireheart looked his way, spotting the grey animal snuffling in

between the plants growing near the frozen river. Graystripe was already heading towards it. He crouched, pinpointing the position of the vole. Just as he leapt, Brackenpaw and Cinderpaw rolled over in a tussle, knocking him out of position.

Letting out a yowl, Graystripe landed flat on the ice, breaking it under his heavy weight. Water immediately began to soak his fur and he drag him down even as he scrambled for a hold. "Help!"

Fireheart looked at him in alarm, then sprung into action. He tried the ice cautiously with his paws, wanting to save his best friend.

Splash! Fireheart looked up.

A beautiful silver-gray tabby she-cat swam to Graystripe. Taking a mouthful of Graystripe's fur between her teeth, she swam with powerful churns of her paws over to Fireheart, dragging him onto land. Fireheart helped her, holding Graystripe's soggy fur in his jaws and pulling him.

Cinderpaw and Brackenpaw helped the silver-gray she-cat. She nodded to them in thanks, then looked over to Graystripe. He was sitting up, coughing up water. Then he lay still.

"Graystripe!" Fireheart meowed urgently.

"I'm okay," wheezed Graystripe. His mew was breathless, but reassuring.

Fireheart sighed and sat down. He looked closer at the silver tabby. She carried the scent of RiverClan on her. After watching her swim, Fireheart wasn't surprised. The tabby returned his gaze coldly, shook herself, and sat down, her sides heaving as she got her breath back.

Graystripe turned his head and looked at his rescuer. "Thanks," he croaked.

"You mouse-brain!" She spat, flattening her ears. "What are you doing in my territory?"

"Drowning?" replied Graystripe.

The silver tabby flicked her ears, and Fireheart saw a glimmer of amusement in her eyes. "Can't you drown yourself in your own territory?"

Graystripe's whiskers twitched. "Ah, but who would rescue me there?" he rasped.

There was a tiny mew behind Fireheart. He turned to see Cinderpaw crouching by a clump of grass farther up the bank. "Where's Brackenpaw?" he asked.

"Just coming," answered Cinderpaw, pointing with her nose. Her brother was creeping nervously along the bank towards them.

Fireheart sighed and turned to his friend. "Look, Graystripe, we've got to get out of here."

"I know." Graystripe pushed himself to his paws and turned to the silver tabby. "Thanks again."

She dipped her head graciously, but hissed, "Hurry, go now!" She looked over her shoulder. "If my father knew I'd rescued a ThunderClan intruder he'd shred me for kit bedding!"

"Why'd you save me then?" teased Graystripe.

The tabby looked away. "Instinct. I couldn't watch any cat drown. Now go away!"

Fireheart stood up. "Thanks. I'd have missed this furball if he'd drowned." He nudged Graystripe. His friend hadn't even shaken the icy water from his fur and he was soaked to the skin. "Come on, let's get back to camp. You're freezing!"

"Okay, I'm coming!" Graystripe mewed. But before he followed Fireheart up the slope, he turned back to the silver she-cat. "What's your name? Mine's Graystripe."

"Silverstream," she replied, and bounded away, back onto the ice and over the channel of water to the far side.

Fireheart and Graystripe led their apprentices through the bracken,

toward the border. Fireheart couldn't help noticing that Graystripe looked back over his shoulder more than once.

Cinderpaw noticed too. The little gray cat glanced up, mischief dancing in her eyes. "What a pretty RiverClan she-cat she was!"

Graystripe gave her a playful cuff around the ear and she ran on ahead. After a while, she came back to them. Lowering her head, she whispered, "Sorry."

Fireheart sighed, shaking his head. "It's not your fault." He looked at his friend, who was shivering much more visibly now. They quickened the pace, Graystripe eager to curl up in a warm nest.

Fireheart led the way through the gorse entrance. His heart sank when he saw Tigerclaw sitting in the clearing watching them.

The deputy fixed his sharp eyes on Graystripe. "You look half-drowned, Graystripe. You must have fallen in a river to get that wet." His nostrils flared and he drew himself up to his full height. "Don't tell me you've been into RiverClan territory!"

Author's Note:

Sandstorm and Dustpelt? Graystripe and Silverstream?

Hey guys! I had to refer back to the previous books a lot for this scene and the next few scenes :) I changed the drowning scene a bit to make it shorter so that I could twist the plot of this story into the original one so that it all adds up. More ideas have been coming in, I'm super excited to write more!

I changed Dustpelt's character to be a little more 'jealous' over here because let's just say, in this fanfiction, that he likes Sandstorm and doesn't like the thought of her being with Fireheart.

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, (sorry if it's a little boring because I wanted to add a few scenes of the original plot into this story), would love to hear your thoughts (I really like the way Graystripe and Silverstream met, they're so sweet! :)) Tigerclaw seems to be thinking a lot hmm..

PS: Picture attached up above doesn't belong to me

~Jayhow

5

Fireheart lifted his head, about to speak, but Cinderpaw beat him to it.

"It's my fault, Tigerclaw." She stared boldly up at the great tabby. "We were hunting on a frozen stream near the training hollow. I was careless - I slipped, and Graystripe came to help me. But the ice wasn't thick enough for him and it cracked and he fell into the water." Tigerclaw looked into her clear, bright eyes for a moment. His gaze was searching, a little intimidating. As if they were well acquainted and he was trying to warn her. It gave Fireheart an uneasy feeling.

But after a heartbeat, he nodded and looked at Graystripe. " You'd better get yourself to Yellowfang before you freeze to death." The ThunderClan deputy stood up and stalked away, and Fireheart breathed a sigh of relief.

Brackenpaw dipped his head respectfully, leaving Fireheart and his sister while he went to get some fresh-kill. Cinderpaw was just about to leave when Fireheart stopped her. "Aren't you even a bit frightened of Tigerclaw?" he asked curiously.

"Why should I be?" replied Cinderpaw. "He's a great warrior. I admire him."

Of course, why shouldn't she? Fireheart thought. He nodded at Cinderpaw to dismiss her. She hesitated a little, her eyes telling a different story from what she had said. Then she dipped her head and left him, heading towards Brackenpaw.

Fireheart sighed. What was going on between Cinderpaw and Tigerclaw?

***

Cinderpaw took a shaky breath. Tigerclaw sat in front of her, his

eyes holding a glint of danger as he stared her down. "Are you sure you were telling me the truth back there?"

"I'm sure." *Anything to keep Fireheart safe.* Cinderpaw looked at her paws. Lying was the best way to protect of all them. Even if she had to suffer the consequences.

Tigerclaw looked up as a cat padded into the tiny spot behind one of the huge trees. "Darkstripe," he nodded at him. "Have you figured a path they should take?"

Darkstripe dipped his head, eyes glancing at Cinderpaw for a moment before looking back up at Tigerclaw. "Yes. All is done."

"Good. I hope you do not fail me this time," Tigerclaw growled. Darkstripe swallowed, flattening his ears.

"I wish you had more faith in me."

"You deserve none." He snarled in reply. Cinderpaw's tiny voice piped up, breaking the tense silence between them.

"What path?"

Tigerclaw's attention snapped back to Cinderpaw. He narrowed his eyes. "Nothing you need to worry about currently, Cinderpaw. But I promise you'll have a little taste of the plan about to unfold." His claws curled into the earth, tearing up fresh clumps of dirt.

Cinderpaw shivered, flinching as Tigerclaw and Darkstripe stood and left the spot, leaving Cinderpaw alone with her thoughts. *Fireheart, why couldn't you sense what I was trying to tell you? Why can't you see that I need you?*

***

Fireheart looked up at Bluestar in surprise. "Me and Sandstorm? Only two of us on a patrol?"

Bluestar nodded. "Tigerclaw needs more warriors to patch up the dens for the coming leafbare."

"And you?" Fireheart asked. "What do *you* want?"

Bluestar stared at him in confusion. "What-what I want?"

Fireheart nodded, stepping closer. He searched her eyes for the wisdom he used to see, for the understanding that he admired in her. But now it was gone. All he could see was sadness and tiredness, a strange weariness in her that he had never seen before.

She stared at him for a while longer, then shook her head. "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're saying. Whatever Tigerclaw says is what's right. Just follow him."

"But-"

"No arguing with me, Fireheart." Bluestar snapped, turning back to go to her den. Fireheart stared after her, wondering what he could do when Sandstorm bumped into him, breaking his thoughts.

"Hello there, partner!" She mewed enthusiastically. "We're going on a patrol together?"

Fireheart purred. "Yes, we are." As they headed to the entrance, Fireheart couldn't help but notice Dustpelt talking to Tigerclaw. Sandstorm pointedly walked past Dustpelt, and judging from her posture, Fireheart could tell she was mad.

He caught up to her as she sprinted to Fourtrees. Silently, he admired her speed. She was still two fox lengths ahead when she leaped over the trunk of a fallen tree and disappeared.

Fireheart followed, taking the tree in a single bound. As he landed on the other side, something hit him from behind. He skidded, rolled over, and sprang to his paws.

Sandstorm faced him, her whiskers twitching. "Surprise!"

Fireheart hissed playfully and leaped on top of her. He was impressed by her strength, but he had the advantage of size. When he finally held her down, she protested, "Get off, you great lump!"

"Okay, okay!" Fireheart purred, letting go of her. "But you asked

for it!"

Purring, they completed their rounds and made it back to camp.

***

Fireheart tossed and turned in his nest. All he could think about was Spottedleaf. Her face flashed across his mind, whispering words in her sweet voice... *Spottedleaf, I miss you so much...*

I miss you too, Fireheart. I'm waiting for you, here in StarClan. Don't forget me.

I'll never forget you... Suddenly, Tigerclaw's face flashed up in his mind, and Fireheart felt the whole day's grudges bear down on him again, forcing him awake with a small cry.

When he lifted his gaze, he met Sandstorm's hurt ones. Her green eyes shone with sadness and hurt. "Sandstorm?" He muttered, confused. It was in the middle of the night. "What are you still doing awake?"

"You were crying out in your sleep. I couldn't help but hear..." Sandstorm swallowed. "Never mind. It isn't important."

"Sandstorm..."

"It's okay. Just... leave me alone." Sandstorm whispered, curling back into her nest, right beside Dustpelt.

Sighing, Fireheart turned his back on them and tried to sleep.

Author's Note:

New chapter up! :) What did you guys think of this chapter? I included a few scenes of Fireheart and Sandstorm, a little bit of Cinderpaw and Tigerclaw... Yea, I'm sorry this took so long to write, I was kinda busy. And how dare Fireheart still think about Spottedleaf :/ I feel sorry for Sandstorm, but seems like she has Dustpelt ;)

Anyway, I want to thank a certain person out there for making me smile today. And thank you to all of you too! I don't know where I'd be without you guys :)

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, see ya' soon!

~Jayhow

6

"Where's Bluestar?" Fireheart turned to Whitestorm, puzzled.

"I heard she has greencough. I wanted to see her earlier, but Yellowfang doesn't allow anyone near her." Whitestorm replied, his eyes filled with worry.

Cinderpaw, who was standing next to Fireheart, butted into the conversation. "Fireheart, why hasn't Graystripe been taking Brackenpaw out for training these past few days?"

Alarmed, Fireheart glanced at Whitestorm. He looked puzzled, but didn't prod into it. He dipped his head and left politely, allowing Fireheart to talk to his apprentice. "Well..." Fireheart fumbled for the right words while deep inside irritation started growing in him. Why was Graystripe so irresponsible? "That's because he's been feeling a bit sick lately. I... I'll be training Brackenpaw in his absence."

Cinderpaw hesitated, then nodded. Fireheart felt a deep sense of relief, then caught sight of Yellowfang padding out of the medicine den to the fresh-kill pile. "Cinderpaw, training will have to be delayed for today. I want you to go hunting with Brackenpaw and bring back as much prey as you can."

Cinderpaw cocked her head. "Why?"

Fireheart sighed. "Because I need to see how Bluestar is doing." When Cinderpaw left, Fireheart headed over to Yellowfang. "How's Bluestar?"

Yellowfang looked up, her gaze wary. "She's still holding up."

"Is there any way I can help?"

Yellowfang hesitated, then nodded slowly. "I'm running low on catmint. Can you help me get some?"

"Sure." Fireheart headed to the camp entrance, but just then the gorse bushes rustled and Dustpelt rushed in, breathing heavily. He looked frightened, as though he'd just seen a badger. Fireheart paused, wondering what had made him so ruffled up.

"Fireheart! Where's Bluestar? Tigerclaw wants her to come and see proof of ShadowClan prey-stealing." Dustpelt's eyes landed on Fireheart, and hostility rose in them as soon as he saw that it was Fireheart.

"Bluestar's sick with greencough. She can't come."

Dustpelt snapped, "She has to. Tigerclaw said this was urgent."

Fireheart looked at Dustpelt, doubt starting to rise as he saw the warrior's body shaking. Whether it was out of fear or tension, Fireheart didn't know. "I'll go if it's so urgent." He couldn't trust what Tigerclaw was saying, and it was obvious he had done something to Dustpelt.

"I can go! I'll tell Tigerclaw that she can't come." Cinderpaw dropped the prey she was carrying as she and Brackenpaw slipped past the camp entrance. Her eyes glanced at Dustpelt, wonderingly searching his gaze.

Fireheart shook his head. "No, Cinderpaw. I don't want you getting hurt."

Cinderpaw gazed at Fireheart a little sadly. "You can't protect me, Fireheart." *Not when Tigerclaw has me and Dustpelt intertwined in his plan.* "Fireheart..." *I'm trying to protect you. I know Tigerclaw is going to hurt you if you go there.* "Please, let me go."

"No." Fireheart shook his head.

Mouse dung! Why does he have to be so stubborn? Cinderpaw looked at Brackenpaw desperately, but he gazed back innocently. *Well, of course.* He *doesn't know about the mess I'm in.*

Yellowfang called from the fresh-kill pile, "Fireheart, collect the catnip for me. Dustpelt can return back to Tigerclaw by himself."

Fireheart hesitated, then nodded at Dustpelt. He left, leaving Cinderpaw behind once again. "I'm going to hunt more." Cinderpaw left the camp as well, except that she was heading in the direction of the ShadowClan border, where she thought Tigerclaw would be.

Fireheart's head jerked up, ears twitching as he tried to pinpoint the location of where he had heard that blood-curdling yowl. It sounded familiar. "Cinderpaw?"

Panic and dread sat at the bottom of his stomach like a stone as he realised that it was, indeed, her. "*No.*" Dropping the catmint he had gathered, Fireheart sprinted over to the ShadowClan border, worry pushing him faster and faster. The wretched, disgusting, stench of the Thunderpath hit his scent glands, followed by a more sickening smell of fresh blood as he neared.

"Cinderpaw!" He yelled.

"Fireheart?" Cinderpaw's small voice called out weakly as Fireheart burst through the underbrush.

Fireheart rushed onto the Thunderpath, where Cinderpaw lay in a small heap. "Cinderpaw, what happened?"

Cinderpaw looked up, her eyes glazed with pain and shock. "I... I accidentally strayed into the path of a monster, and..." Cinderpaw looked down, sadness filling her eyes. "Fireheart, I failed you."

Fireheart tried to calm the panic he felt deep within. It wouldn't do Cinderpaw any good to see him like that. It might even cause her even more harm. Trying to keep his voice steady, he replied, "No, you didn't. I never asked you to come here. I *told* you not to come here. Where's Tigerclaw?"

"He... He left me here." Cinderpaw whispered, ashamed.

Anger filled Fireheart at the older warrior's act of unkindness. Where was his morality? But he tried brushing it off as he addressed what was most important at the moment. "Cinderpaw, where do

you hurt the most?"

"My leg. I... I think I broke it."

Fireheart sniffed her leg. It didn't take a medicine cat to know that there was something really wrong with it. It was twisted at an odd angle.

The scent of blood drew him to look at her cheek. It was dripping with blood, the claw marks of a cat etched deep into her face. "Cinderpaw, who did this to you?" The anger in Fireheart built up once again.

Cinderpaw turned her face away immediately. "It's... it's nothing. I just scratched myself while rushing here."

Fireheart narrowed his eyes, wanting to force her to tell the truth, until he saw her trembling body. *She must have gone through a lot of stress and shock.* Sadness to see his fiery apprentice look so defeated made his heart ache. Bending down, he gently licked her head. "Can you stand?"

"I... I think so. I might need help to walk." Cinderpaw tried getting to her paws, wincing.

"I'll go get Yellowfang. You shouldn't force yourself to walk. I'll get a patrol of cats so that we can carry you back to camp too." Fireheart fussed softly, helping her get off the Thunderpath and onto the grass.

Cinderpaw sat on the grass in a miserable heap. "I'm sorry for causing so much trouble, Fireheart. I didn't mean to-"

Fireheart gently placed his tail over her shoulder, trying to comfort her. "You're not causing me any trouble, Cinderpaw. I never want to see you come to any harm." He placed his muzzle over hers, wanting to soothe her. "Try not scare me like this next time, alright?" He purred, trying to lighten the mood. "Does your leg still hurt?"

"If I don't move it, it doesn't hurt that much." Cinderpaw confessed. But Fireheart knew she was hiding more than she said.

"I'll go get Yellowfang. Don't move, and call if anything happens." Fireheart stood up, looking down at his apprentice.

"I will," Cinderpaw rested her head on her front paws, closing her eyes and sighing.

Author's Note:

***hides in the bushes* hehe, I know I haven't updated in like.. 2 months? Whoops XD**

Sorryy, it's just that recently I've been really busy and haven't been able to find the time to write. I half-completed this chapter like... a month ago? But kinda abandoned it for a while because I had no inspiration.

I know this chapter didn't really have that much drama, but wHaT iS DuSTpELt'S sUsPIcOUs AcT and what's Cinderpaw involved in? Also a little scene of Fireheart and Cinderpelt :3 (it's sweet how she always puts Fireheart ahead of her, but maddening how Fireheart doesn't really think about her much ヽ(ಠ_ಠ)ノ) I also still feel sad whenever I think back to how Cinderpaw broke her leg and how she missed a warrior's life so writing this was like... yeah.

I followed the way the story flowed as in the original Warriors book, just portrayed it differently :)

Hope you enjoyed this chapter, and thanks for putting up with me >.<

~Jayhow

7

Fireheart padded into the medicine den, squeezing between the two rocks that marked the entrance to it. Cinderpaw lay in a round ball of fur, resting peacefully. Her leg was splayed out in front of her so that she didn't put any pressure on it while resting.

Yellowfang sat nearby, her eyes glowing in the shadier part of the den. "Fireheart," she greeted. "Cinderpelt should be able to walk soon. She's getting much better."

Fireheart nodded slowly, his eyes still on Cinderpaw's breathing form. He waited for more, then slowly looked up to meet Yellowfang's serious yet sad eyes. "But?" He swallowed.

"I'm afraid she will not be able to continue her warrior duties."

Fireheart heard a small hitch in Cinderpaw's breathing, and he immediately looked in her direction. "Cinderpaw?"

The apprentice opened her eyes, lifting her head to meet Fireheart's gaze. Then she turned away, a look of sadness plastered over her face. Yellowfang stood, leaving the den quietly.

"I'm sorry, Cinderpaw."

"No, *I'm* sorry. I failed you as an apprentice, Fireheart. I-" Cinderpaw took a deep breath.

Fireheart padded over to where she sat, her body shaking. He wrapped his tail around her shoulders in a comforting manner. "You didn't fail me, Cinderpaw. You're the best apprentice any mentor could ask for. You're fearless, you always put others ahead of you, and you're hard-working. I'm sure you'll do great as a medicine cat, Cinderpaw. Next time I'll be looking to *you* for help."

Cinderpaw shook her head. "That's not it." *Oh Fireheart, you don't know what happened last season.*

"Fireheart! Bluestar wants us to carry out a hunting patrol. Cinderpaw, how're you feeling?" Sandstorm poked her head into the medicine den, interrupting Fireheart before he could say anything.

Cinderpaw tried sounding cheerful. "Doing better!" but deep inside, a gnawing worry ate at her heart. Jealousy also climbed into her mind when she saw the way Fireheart and Sandstorm stared at each other, both obviously not wanting to speak to each other but not being able to hide the chemistry.

She felt like a third-wheel.

"If you ever need anything, just tell me. I'll be here for you." Fireheart rested his muzzle on Cinderpaw's head, then left. Leaving her alone with her thoughts.

She could still remember it - the day the accident happened.

"What are you doing here?" Tigerclaw snarled, lips curled back. "It's supposed to be Bluestar, or even Fireheart. Not you!"

"Don't you dare harm Fireheart!" Cinderpaw snapped, her heart beating with fear but adrenaline and a fire inside of her pushing her on.

At first Tigerclaw looked slightly shocked, then he broke into an amused purr. "Someone has a soft spot for the kittypet, *doesn't she?" He paused, looking at Cinderpaw for her reaction. She tried not to move a muscle, her body quivering with tension. "But it doesn't look like he likes her much - he's too busy spending all his time with Sandstorm."*

Cinderpaw leapt, but with one slash Tigerclaw flung her away. She landed on the grass with a loud thump.

"Tigerclaw, stop." Dustpelt whispered quietly. His back bore his own punishment from Tigerclaw, claw marks streaked with his blood.

*Tigerclaw turned his burning amber eyes on Dustpelt, madness glazing his eyes. "*You're *telling me to stop? Hmm, I think you haven't learned your lesson yet, Dustpelt."*

Far away there was a loud, shrieking sound of something like thunder. Tigerclaw's eyes lit up with delight. Turning back to Dustpelt, Tigerclaw

gestured to Cinderpaw with his tail. "I order you to push Cinderpaw in the middle of the Thunderpath and pin her down until the monster comes up. You can leave only after she's hurt."

*"*No.*" Dustpelt's eyes widened. "No, you can't mean that Tigerclaw."*

Tigerclaw snarled, spittle flying out of his mouth. "Do it, or you'll be the one there instead."

Dustpelt shook his head violently. "I can't do that Tigerclaw."

The monster rolled into sight, its thunderous sound reverberating in their ears. Tigerclaw narrowed his eyes. "You can, and you will."

The monster drew nearer. Tigerclaw pounced on Dustpelt, snagging his fur in his jaw before dragging him over to Cinderpaw. Cinderpaw glanced at Dustpelt, fear in her eyes.

The monster chugged closer and closer.

Dustpelt was pushed forward by a nudge from Tigerclaw, the large warrior pinning Dustpelt to the spot. "Do it," he whispered into his ear.

The monster was only a few fox lengths away when Dustpelt slashed Tigerclaw's belly. The large warrior shrieked in pain and Dustpelt twisted out of his grasp, running towards the safety of the woods. "Run, Cinderpaw!" He yelled over his shoulder.

Cinderpaw, frozen for a second, realised what had happened and tried to run as well. But Tigerclaw was faster, his paw flashing out and pushing her back towards him - back towards the Thunderpath.

Screaming, she tumbled over - right into the monster's path.

Author's Note:

AHH this story has been dead for a long time, hasn't it? :')

I'm back:) holidays are coming soon and I'm super happy to finally be able to focus more on writing, drawing, and all the other things I haven't been able to do. I'm so excited for Christmas although it's like a month away - is it just me? Yes?

Okayyy.

Anyways, hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! Hopefully the next time I update it won't take this long :3 thank you all for your support so far ＜3

~Jayhow

PS : thank you guys so much for 1K!! I don't deserve this :(

8

Bluestar's fiery blue gaze pinned Dustpelt to the spot, Tigerclaw standing next to her with a small smirk on his face.

“What is the meaning of this? Tigerclaw tells me you've been picking fights with ShadowClan just because of the border conflict again.” Bluestar's tail flicked to point at his body that still bore Tigerclaw's claw marks. “I don't want to see you with anymore injuries like that.”

Dustpelt winced, bowing his head. “Yes, Bluestar.” he muttered. Tigerclaw's amber gaze held a look of satisfaction as he stretched lazily.

“You're causing much shame to the warrior code and to our clan, Dustpelt. I trust that this will not happen again?” Tigerclaw was clearly mocking him.

Cinderpaw watched from the medicine den, pity and anger battling each other at how Tigerclaw was treating Dustpelt.

Tigerclaw stepped closer, wanting to intimidate Dustpelt when a sandy flash stopped him in his tracks.

Sandstorm's green eyes blazed in defiance. “Even if Dustpelt was fighting with the ShadowClan cats, I'm sure he was merely trying to protect our name. Besides, I've never once seen him cause a fight with any of the Clans. Do you have proof of him doing so?”

Dustpelt looked up at the sound of Sandstorm's voice. Gratitude flitted across his eyes.

Before Tigerclaw could say anything, Bluestar cut in. “Enough. I don't want anything like this to happen again.

Tigerclaw glared at Sandstorm, but sulkily stalked away. “Don't be a coward, Tigerclaw - you should stop blaming cats for your faults.”

Sandstorm called after him.

Tigerclaw spun around, but Sandstorm held her ground, her anger matching his. By now most of the Clan was gathered around them. Including Fireheart.

Thank you, Sandstorm. Cinderpaw thought, watching coolly as the scene played out. Her heart kicked up again when she saw Fireheart step in between the two cats.

"Tigerclaw, I believe it is time for you to assign us to patrols?" He looked at the deputy with a calm expression.

Tigerclaw hissed angrily, then padded away.

When Fireheart turned to talk to Sandstorm, he found her already talking with Dustpelt, back facing him. Annoyance crept into his tone, "Sandstorm-"

"Thanks for trying to help." She said over her shoulder, not bothering to turn to face him. She continued talking to Dustpelt, but Fireheart couldn't hear what she was saying. Neither did he care, because he was ticked off at what she had said.

"*Trying* to help?" Fireheart repeated in an incredulous tone.

"Yes. *Trying* to help." Sandstorm replied, finally turning around to face him. He could tell she was annoyed by the way her tail was twitching. But he was annoyed too.

"Can I talk to you for a moment?" Fireheart asked. Dustpelt's head popped over Sandstorm's shoulder, then he walked around to sit next to her. "*Alone*?" He emphasised.

"What would you like to speak to her alone for?" Dustpelt asked, hostility clear in his voice.

"About things you don't need to know about." Fireheart snapped, tired of his suspicion.

"Oh really? I think whatever you have to say to her, you can say it

in front of me, too."

"No. I'm pretty sure she wants her own privacy."

"With you? No, she detests you."

"Even if she did, how would you know?"

"Because she's my best friend and-"

"Pfft, you're just jealous that she doesn't like you."

"And you think she likes you?"

"Stop it." Sandstorm snapped. "Who are you to speak for me?" She glared at the two bristling toms.

Standing, she walked out of camp, glancing at Fireheart to follow her.

"What did you want to talk to me about?" Sandstorm found a small space in the middle of some bushes and sat down.

"I know you're still mad at me about the Spottedleaf thing-"

"Who said I was mad?" Sandstorm snapped, bristling slightly.

"Would you just let me finish?" Fireheart sighed. "You get so worked up over things before I even say them."

Sandstorm opened her mouth to protest, then shut it. Her green eyes blazed.

"I *understand* you're mad at me, but you don't have to keep treating me this way."

"This is how I treat you all the time. What's the difference?"

"No. You don't." Fireheart narrowed his eyes. Sandstorm was fidgeting - and he knew why. Often when she was trying to hide an emotion that she didn't want to feel, she would turn it into anger. "Are you…"

Sandstorm cut him off. “The question isn't me - it's you. Are *you* jealous?”

Fireheart stepped back. “What?”

“You heard me. Why would *you* get so worked up over me and Dustpelt talking and him calling me his best friend?” Sandstorm took a step forward, knowing she got the upper hand. “And why would you step in when I stood up for Dustpelt and was willing to suffer the consequences?”

Fireheart cleared his throat. “First, I didn't get worked up. Second, it was my *pride* that made me step in. I wasn't about to allow a *she-cat*, who doesn't know better, to get ripped apart by an angry tom.”

“Humph. Mousedung.” Sandstorm paused. “Hold on, did you just *mock* me?”

“So what if I did? And why do you always have to overthink things between Spottedleaf and I?"

“Listen, you can accuse me of being jealous, but in reality I don't care whether or not you like a *medicine cat* just because of her looks and gentleness!” Sandstorm whispered in a soft voice. As she looked up to meet Fireheart's eyes, although she kept her gaze steady, she carried a look of sadness but strained relief - like she had been holding back her feelings for a long time, and finally got to release it.

“Can you believe how dumb you look, Fireheart? Falling in love with a medicine cat whom you barely even knew before she joined StarClan. You can even *dream* about her and have your fancy delusions about her after you spent a day with *me*. I have a *right* to be mad.

“So..." She trailed off for a second before she cleared her throat and continued, "so don't blame me for defending Dustpelt when he's more worth fighting for. At least he knows what he wants.”

Turning away, Sandstorm stalked off in a brisk manner, leaving Fireheart alone to process everything that she had just said.

- which was true, in a way.

WOOP ANOTHER CHAPTER UP THAT HAD FIGHTS AND UH-YEA. drama.

man I like Sandstorm's sass and how she handles things ;) (just don't get on her bad side like Fireheart - wouldn't want to be in his shoes)

Honestly, in the real series of books if I was Sandstorm I would be mad at Fireheart for how many times he always thinks of Spottedleaf. In this scene I portrayed her to just literally pour out her feelings - because if she didn't, how else would they move on from this problem?

and how does Tigerclaw *always* seem to manage to get away with everything?

as always, hope you enjoyed this chapter :)

~Jayhow

9

Tigerclaw paced around the warriors den, his pawsteps giving off a resounding echo. His next step for his plan was risky but if it pulled off he could claim his revenge on a few cats...

Darkstripe slipped into the den, eyes glinting in the gathering darkness. Tigerclaw snarled, his stress getting to him.

"Tigerclaw? Is everything alright?"

"No. *Nothing* is going according to plan. Who's fault do you think that is?"

"Yours," Darkstripe muttered under his breath. Tigerclaw looked at him sharply, lips beginning to curl back in a snarl.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing." Darkstripe scraped at this nest, trying to make it a little more comfortable.

Tigerclaw narrowed his eyes. "I make plans, I execute my plans, but everyone else always seems to *ruin* them." He dug his claws into the dirt, shredding some moss along with it.

"Cinderpaw-"

"She cannot be used anymore, Darkstripe."

"Maybe she can be used, Tigerclaw." Darkstripe's eyes reflected the moon, glinting in the dark. Tigerclaw felt a pleasant shiver as he quickly latched on to the idea.

"What're you trying to say?" He sheathed his claws, ears pricking forward.

"You want to get rid of Fireheart first before the big plan, right?"

Tigerclaw flattened his ears. Even the thought of Fireheart made his lips curl. "Of course. So?"

Darkstripe's eyes seemed to smile, and he turned around, walking out of the den as a reply.

Excitement ran down Tigerclaw's spine, adrenaline coursing through him. *At long last Darkstripe shows a purpose. I might not have to dispose of him just yet.* Standing, he followed Darkstripe out of the den, his shadow still overshadowing the smaller warrior in front as they headed to the medicine den.

Fireheart stepped out from the den just then, his eyes narrowing as he caught sight of the two formidable warriors approaching. "Tigerclaw, Darkstripe." Fireheart greeted coldly. "Have you come to see Cinderpaw?"

Tigerclaw quickened his pace, stepping in front of Darkstripe and answering the question first. Darkstripe stepped back, irritation and slight jealousy flicking in his eyes, but he suppressed it before Tigerclaw saw. Fireheart didn't miss it though.

"We have. Is she alright?"

"She's fine." Fireheart didn't elaborate, his stance firm and strong as he blocked the way to the medicine den. Tigerclaw flicked his tail.

"Are you stopping us from going to meet our clanmate?" Tigerclaw's voice was tainted in faint amusement, his body relaxed and eyes mocking.

"She's sleeping. I don't want anyone to disturb her."

Tigerclaw purred. "It's funny how you only care about her now. Isn't that right, Darkstripe?" He turned his head slightly, pinning the smaller warrior in his gaze. His eyes hardened.

Darkstripe purred, "He's right, you know." His statement was targeted at Fireheart. Seeing the confused expression on his face, Darkstripe continued, "Why do you think Cinderpaw went to the

thunderpath that day? To please *you,* of course. It's your fault she ended up this way." He stepped closer, yellow eyes seeming to cut straight into Fireheart's soul.

"Stop pretending you care about her now, Fireheart. Only after the *accident* happened." Tigerclaw was now sitting back, tail curled comfortably around his body.

Fireheart felt a slight shiver at how he said the word accident. "I told Cinderpaw not to go that day."

"But she still went. Always trying to please you, that one." Darkstripe purred, claws tracing a small circle on the ground.

"I wasn't the one who slashed her cheek," Fireheart's voice grew a bit more defensive. Tigerclaw's ears twitched in annoyance.

"Didn't she tell you? She slashed it herself - on her way to the Thunderpath."

Darkstripe stepped closer, his nose almost touching Fireheart's. "I think you lost this fight, Fireheart. We're only caring for Cinderpaw in a way you didn't - and can never do."

"I didn't abandon her. You call caring for her as *abandoning* her?" Fireheart snarled, claws digging into the ground in frustration.

Yellowfang stepped out of the den, eyes flashing in annoyance and anger. "Carry your fight elsewhere. I want to get some sleep."

Fireheart whipped around, "Did you hear them? Did you-"

Yellowfang snapped, "I don't want to know, Fireheart. It's in the middle of the night and you're causing a ruckus. Visit Cinderpaw, or *leave.*" She addressed this to Tigerclaw and Darkstripe, fur bristling.

"We're visiting Cinderpaw. Except there was this mousebrain blocking the way and causing such a... *ruckus.*" Yellowfang didn't miss the mocking tone in his voice.

"You may think you're deputy, but you do not hold any power over me." Yellowfang growled. Then she disappeared into the den.

Tigerclaw immediately felt a touch of hatred as he watched the old she-cat disappear into the shadows of the medicine den. *You're wrong. You will beg for my mercy when the time comes. It's almost pathetic,* he thought. *Just another foolish cat to get rid of.*

Darkstripe walked into the den, disappearing after her. Fireheart was visibly shaking in anger, a low growl still rumbling as Tigerclaw shoved his way past him. His bigger, stronger frame pushed Fireheart aside. "This isn't over, *kittypet.*"

Author's Note:

I didn't notice I hadn't updated in such a long time:(I'm sorry for the long wait, buut hopefully I'll be able to upload a few more soon! :) still have tons of work to do even though I currently have a break :")

Such a short chapter bUt the tension is building \0/ Who's side are you on? Cinderpaw or Sandstorm? What do you think Darkstripe planned to do? >.<

~Jayhow

10

Cinderpaw was sorting herbs, her back facing the entrance when she heard the faint rustling of someone brushing past the vines draping over it. “Yellowfang? We're running low on catmint again. The last few days have really used up most of our supplies-”

Tigerclaw seemed to smirk. “I didn't appear to realise when my identity changed to a stinky old cat.”

Cinderpaw froze, her paws brushing over the herbs as she stopped arranging them, tucking them near her. Yellowfang glared at Tigerclaw, padding over to her nest and curling into it.

Cinderpaw met her eyes, but Yellowfang shook her head. Although there was no apology there, she knew what Yellowfang was saying. *There's no way out of this, so try to stay out of trouble for yourself.*

Cinderpaw turned, then caught sight of Darkstripe behind the bigger warrior. “I'm sorry, *deputy*.” She forced it through, her heart pounding.

Tigerclaw narrowed his eyes, and she lifted her head, exposing the claw marks on her cheek under a patch of moonlight. It was a painful reminder, but her legs were one that haunted her everyday - and probably for the rest of her life.

"Aren't you going to greet your old friend?" Darkstripe purred, slipping into a spot next to Tigerclaw.

Cinderpaw didn't respond, but her heart pounded faster. Memories of the thunderpath accident flashed past, and paws stumbled clumsily as she continued pushing the bundles of herbs into neat piles.

"You saw Fireheart just now, didn't you?"

Cinderpaw spun around, her eyes flashing. "You didn't dare do

anything to him, did you?"

"Oh no, we didn't dare. It's just too bad he doesn't share the same feelings you feel about him." Tigerclaw purred, tail flicking slowly. His eyes seemed to gleam in the weak moonlight.

Cinderpaw bared her teeth."What feelings? He's my mentor, of course he'd care about me."

"He cares about you?" Tigerclaw snorted, standing up. "I think I'm wasting my time here, Cinderpaw. Are you blind?"

Cinderpaw unsheathed her claws, digging it into the ground to keep her anger in check. "He *does* care about me."

"Oh really?" Darkstripe said in a mocking tone. "If he really cared about you, he would do anything for you."

Cinderpaw twitched her ears in annoyance. "He was the one who practically saved my life." At this, she looked pointedly at Tigerclaw. His eyes flashed, glancing at Yellowfang.

Yellowfang was sleeping. Cinderpaw almost sighed in exasperation, but felt a little bit relieved.

She remembered what Tigerclaw had said - if anyone found out about anything he'd done, the cat who said it - and the cat who knows it, would suffer.

"He may have saved your life, but he was the one who told you not to go. He probably thought you were just trouble - and got into more trouble after the accident."

Cinderpaw opened the mouth, wanting to retort back, but she couldn't. Inside her heart, she thought the same way. *I'm nothing but trouble to Fireheart.*

Tigerclaw stood up, slowly walking to her. "You know, I pity you. You give your all to someone who doesn't even acknowledge it."

"He *does*."

“Does he really?” Darkstripe pressed.

Tigerclaw shook his head, laying a tail on Cinderpaw's shoulder. She flinched away, but Tigerclaw stepped closer. His eyes seemed to burn into hers. “*Prove it.”*

The night wind blew at the entrance to the medicine cat den, parting the vines away to reveal a young medicine she-cat standing in semi-darkness. Two shadowy figures left the den, and the vines slipped back into place. The atmosphere was calm and quiet, and it was almost as though nothing had happened that night.

***

Tigerclaw crouched, slowing creeping his way forward into the tree's canopy. The long wooden planks loomed ahead, but he could just see above it at the den Twolegs lived in. He could hear them - the horrific huge creatures.

He'd been watching them. *It should be no problem.* They came out everyday, and sometimes couldn't be controlled. *Prey should lure them*.

Fear *should lure them.*

Tigerclaw inched forward a bit more, watching them. After a few heartbeats he decided he'd already seen enough.

Snap!

Tigerclaw's eyes snapped to the bottom of the tree, trying to detect the source. Dropping nimbly back onto the ground, he tasted the air.

His nose twitched in disgust. *Fireheart.*

Snarling, he slashed at the ground. Little grains of dirt fell to the ground from his claws, and he watched it without much interest.

The kittypet is smart. Thinking back to Cinderpaw, he almost slashed out again in frustration. *I need to get rid of him - fast.*

AN:

ayy,, hope you guys enjoyed <3 literally typed this story on a bus ahah, sorry if there are any spelling mistakes. I'll try to update soon:)

~Jayhow

11

The wind whipped lashes of rain against his face. Fireheart struggled to get into the medicine den, helping Brackenfur into it. His body was racked with coughs, and he stumbled towards a nearby nest.

Cinderpaw looked up from giving Whitestorm catmint. "Brackenfur!" she cried, rushing to him. Sighing, she listened to his chest. "It's not so serious yet." Turning to her supply of catmint, she hissed worriedly.

"I don't have enough to treat him, and Yellowfang's away at the Moonstone..." She whispered, kneading the ground in worry as she contemplated her options.

Prove it.

Tigerclaw's voice whispered in her ear, and she remembered that night. *You give your all to someone who doesn't even acknowledge it.* But he does, doesn't he?

As Cinderpaw looked at Fireheart uncertainly, he looked back with a concerned look in his eyes. *If he really cared, he would help you.*

Her gaze slipped to the entrance of the medicine den, where Tigerclaw sat calmly, watching the situation. He dipped his head when he met her gaze, as though he was reminding her.

"Fireheart, would it be too much to ask of you to go to ShadowClan territory to get more catmint?"

After a moment of silence, Fireheart slowly nodded his head. His eyes flitted worriedly over the sick cats. *I need to risk it for the sake of these cats.* At the back of his mind, he knew this was just a feeble excuse to the real reason he agreed to help Cinderpaw - he felt that he owed it to her. It was true, the accident only happened because

she was trying to help him. Darkstripe's words said that night echoed in his mind, *'we're only caring for Cinderpaw in a way you didn't - and can never do.'*

I'll prove them wrong, Fireheart thought sourly. He stood up and left, brushing past Tigerclaw at the entrance. His eyes gleamed as Fireheart left, a part of his plan accomplished.

Sandstorm padded into the camp after a day's hunting. Fireheart had just left camp-- wait, why did it matter to her?

With the day's catch dangling from her mouth, she dropped it at the fresh-kill pile. She forced herself to sit, to not wonder about where Fireheart was going. Her anger towards him was still there, her dignity holding her back from talking to him.

But it wouldn't hurt to just see what he's doing, right? It's called caring - and making sure he wasn't doing anything to bring down the Clan's name. With that, Sandstorm stood up with a slight shake of her head. *That's right, I'm just being a responsible Clanmate and making sure he doesn't do anything mouse-brained.*

Bounding to the entrance, she caught Fireheart's scent immediately and tracked it to the ShadowClan border.

ShadowClan border? What is he-

Sandstorm ducked into one of the bushes, lying low against the ground as a flock of birds fluttered overhead, sounding an alarm.

A patrol of ShadowClan cats burst from the underbrush, tails flicking in annoyance- with Fireheart standing right in the middle, holding a bundle of catmint in his mouth.

Dumb, dumb, dumb. Sandstorm's mind raced, both insulting him and thinking of ways to get him out of this mess. Bluestar won't be happy, but even Sandstorm could see that he had crossed the border for pure intentions - to get catmint. *Why didn't he ask permission first?*

"I told you, the catmint was very urgent. I would've gone back to inform you I had taken some catmint after I've given it to my Clan.

We're sick, Cinderfur." Fireheart said, standing his ground as he tried to look tall. His head was raised defiantly, eyes locked with the ShadowClan deputy.

Cinderfur's flanks were heaving, and Sandstorm noted the white fur growing on his muzzle. He shook his head, "It is common protocol for you to have asked us first. You could be lying, or sent to check our camp."

Sandstorm almost snorted at the accusation. Fireheart was holding the catmint, plain and clear.

Before Fireheart could defend himself, there was a rustle in the bushes nearby. Tigerclaw and Darkstripe's formidable forms slipped out from the gathering shadows as the sun sank below the clouds.

"Cinderfur," Tigerclaw nodded his head in greeting. The deputy stepped back and dipped his head in return. "Is Fireheart giving you any trouble?"

Cinderfur glanced between Tigerclaw and Fireheart. "Yes. Keep your warriors under control, Tigerclaw."

"I'm sorry," Tigerclaw dipped his head towards the ShadowClan patrol. "We were really in need of the... catmint."

Cinderfur bared his teeth, trying his best to look fierce even though his ribs stood out starkly. "See that it does not happen again, or I will bring this up."

Sandstorm waited as the ShadowClan patrol left, leaving Fireheart behind. Fireheart nodded at Tigerclaw. "Thank you. I was just getting some catmint for Cinderpaw."

"Cinderpaw?" Darkstripe nearly smiled. "Seems like you're keeping your promise, Fireheart."

Fireheart shrugged. "I just wanted to help."

"You mean *treat her better.*" Tigerclaw added in pointedly. "I'm glad, Fireheart. But you shouldn't have crossed the ShadowClan border like that. I have to tell Bluestar, you know."

Sandstorm felt a twinge of jealousy. *Promise? What promise? Fireheart and Cinderpaw?*

Fireheart picked up the catmint again, flattened his ears and nodded firmly. He pushed past Tigerclaw and Darkstripe, heading to camp himself to meet Bluestar and face the consequences. Sandstorm stood up with a giddy sort of feeling, then realised that Fireheart might need her help.

But is he even worth it, after all that we've been through? And surely Cinderpaw *would be there to help him now.* Sandstorm thought bitterly. But jealousy wasn't a type of feeling she liked, so as she ran, she got rid of it. *He's my Clanmate. I will speak only the truth.* Because she knew, someway or another, Tigerclaw was going to twist his words and without a witness, Fireheart might very well be toast.

AN: adlkjgsl sorry for such a looong time without any update:(I feel like i've been repeating this too often lol, I just can't find the time to sit down and actually begin to write, or maybe sometimes it's just writer's block.

hope you guys enjoyed this chapter:) what do you think Tigerclaw is planning? :o

See ya' soon:)

- Jayhow

12

There was a commotion outside, cats gathering to hear what had happened while some in the medicine den peeked out.

Tigerclaw, Darkstripe, and Fireheart stood in the middle of it all. Sandstorm stood nearby, her ears pricked and eyes alert.

"Bluestar," Tigerclaw called, and it almost looked like he was smirking in victory.

The leader padded out of her den, her eyes wincing at the sudden piercing of sunlight after the darkness of her den.

White sprinkled her muzzle as she slowly stretched, blue eyes taking in the situation. "Tigerclaw? What's the matter?"

Tigerclaw stepped forward. "Fireheart crossed the ShadowClan border without permission."

Fireheart stepped up as well, chest puffed up in defense. "It was for catmint. Cinderpaw ran out of them, and our Clan was in desperate need of it."

Cinderpaw squeezed in next to Sandstorm, her eyes worried as she thought of what Tigerclaw was planning next.

"Cinderpaw, is this true?" Bluestar asked.

Sandstorm spoke up, cutting Cinderpaw off. "Bluestar, I can vouch for this. I saw Fireheart, and he really did just cross the border for catmint."

Bluestar coolly looked past Sandstorm, focusing on Cinderpaw. "I asked Cinderpaw, not you."

Sandstorm flinched, her gaze slipping to Fireheart. He nodded his head towards her, gratitude in his eyes. Then his attention focused on Cinderpaw.

Sandstorm watched as Cinderpaw confirmed this and Fireheart's eyes fill with pride.

Bluestar narrowed her eyes. "As long as they didn't take offense, I don't see why there's such a commotion."

Tigerclaw lashed his tail in frustration. "He needs to be punished, Bluestar. He should be made an example of, and during the Gathering you should announce his punishment so that all the other Clans know that we take these rules very seriously."

Bluestar paused. Her eyes landed on Fireheart. "What do you have to say for yourself, Fireheart? Do you think you deserve punishment?"

Fireheart hesitated. How could he say he didn't need punishment in front of the whole Clan when he did do something wrong?

"I… I do deserve punishment, Bluestar." He bowed his head in acceptance.

Sandstorm was about to open her mouth to defend him again, but Cinderpaw beat her to it.

She limped forward, head tall. "It's actually my fault, Bluestar. I asked him to get more catmint, and… and that's the only reason why he crossed the border. I deserve the punishment."

"No!" Fireheart broke in. *This might be Tigerclaw's plan, to punish Cinderpaw for something she didn't do.* Fireheart knew that there was something going on between the two, but he didn't know what. Anyhow, he owed it to Cinderpaw after she sacrificed everything for him to at least protect her. "Don't, Bluestar. I take full blame."

Tigerclaw hissed, annoyed. *I was planning to just get rid of Fireheart, but both would do just fine.* "Pathetic. Since they both want punishment so much, I suggest giving them both what they want."

Bluestar shook her head. "Cinderpaw needs to stay here to take care of the sick. Fireheart, I sentence you to exile only until Yellowfang comes back. I cannot afford to lose any warriors and she may have something to say about it."

Darkstripe glanced at Tigerclaw, wondering what he would say about it. Tigerclaw looked back at him, slight anger crowding his gaze. *Let's just hope Yellowfang doesn't come back any time soon.*

Fireheart dipped his head in acceptance. Sandstorm lashed her tail and slipped away from the crowd, frustration jumbling her emotions up. *I couldn't even help him.*

Cinderpaw's gaze followed Fireheart's dejected form as he left the camp entrance. *Don't worry, Fireheart. I'll be there.*

But now her duty was to the sick cats waiting for their dose of catmint.

Fireheart slumped through thick mud as rain started to pour. He climbed up the bank, finally resting under some bushes after making sure he was some fox-lengths away from any territory.

This punishment didn't make sense. Tigerclaw probably just wanted him out of the way - but for what? What was he planning?

Fireheart felt a deep worry for his Clan as he closed his eyes, slipping into a murky dream.

Twigs snapping broke his sleep. He lifed his head, trying to smell the air. Rain masked all scents, but he could hear heavy trudging nearby.

He leaped to his paws, ears straining to hear where the animal was.

A black and white form appeared out of the slight mist. *Badger*! Fireheart snarled, leaping forward as the badger charged.

He scraped its nose, slipping underneath its underbelly as it howled in pain. Fireheart raked his sharp claws through the badger's vulnerable belly. He wriggled out, but not before one of the badger's hind paws crashed down on his shoulder, wrenching it from its normal position.

He crumbled, but tried to stand hurriedly as the badger's claws came swiping down on him, scratching his pelt. Blood welled out.

Fireheart hissed in pain, waiting for the next attack, but the badger was already lumbering away, carrying its own amount of heavy wounds.

He scrambled to find shelter under a low overhanging rock, away from the wind and rain. Shivering, he curled up.

He was awoken again by faint calling. "Fireheart? Fireheart!"

Cinderpaw?

Her form stumbled through some undergrowth, mud sloshing around. "Great StarClan!" Cinderpaw cried once she spotted him, rushing forward.

Fireheart mumbled some incomprehensible words, falling asleep again with Cinderpaw's steady licking at his pelt wounds, trying to get rid of dirt.

"I'm here, don't worry."

AN

hey hey, new update <3

ok I know the punishment was a little lame and out of the blue, but I couldn't think of anything else that gets Fireheart out of the way :") if there's any better suggestions please let me know!!

AND WHOOP CINDERPAW & FIREHEART MOMENT, where are the shippers?

hope y'all enjoyed this chapter:))

see ya' soon!
~Jayhow

13

[image]

Sandstorm watched in curiosity and slight suspicion as Cinderpaw slipped out the camp's entrance with a bundle of herbs in her mouth. Her reason was that she needed to identify the same herbs as the ones she already has, but Sandstorm didn't believe one mousedung of it. Medicine cats are supposed to remember every plant, right?

Sandstorm finished her mouse off, licking her jaws. She could almost bet that Cinderpaw was going to Fireheart, but she wasn't so sure.

A biting guilt gnawed at her. *I couldn't even do anything to stop Fireheart from being exiled.* She stood up, whisking her tail back and forth.

A wave of uneasiness washed over her as she realised there was someone looking at her. It was Tigerclaw. She glared back, daring him to hold her gaze. *That fox-heart. He probably planned all this to get Fireheart out of the way.*

No matter, I'll find him tonight. Just to make sure he's okay.

Sandstorm waited until all was dark. The warriors den was filled with sleeping cats, all tired from the day's work.

Sandstorm peeked her head out at the night patrol. There was Brindleface and Dustpelt. *Easy.*

Sandstorm padded out, heading to the entrance.

"Where are you going?" Dustpelt called out, catching sight of her from the corner of his eye.

"Just having a night walk to clear my head." Sandstorm replied back

smoothly. Without waiting for a reply, she slipped out the camp's entrance, heading into the night.

Sandstorm opened her mouth, letting the forest's night scents wash over her scent glands. Her tail twitching, ears pricked to catch any sound, she followed Cinderpaw's waning scent. It led her weaving about the trees, at times double-crossing as though Cinderpaw was trying to shake off anyone trying to track her.

Persistent, Sandstorm concentrated on following her scent - that is, until she heard Fireheart's voice.

Heart pounding in excitement and anticipation, she nearly bounded out of the bushes where she knew on the other side would be Fireheart. However, as she caught flashes of his flame-coloured pelt, Sandstorm also saw patches of dark grey fur. *Cinderpaw.*

Cinderpaw bent over Fireheart, dropping her crushed herbs into Fireheart's wound and smoothing them. Fireheart closed his eyes, wincing slightly but withstanding the numbing pain. "Thank you, Cinderpaw." He muttered.

Cinderpaw, job done, sat back on her haunches. Fireheart stared up at her, searching wonderingly in her sad gaze. "Do you regret any decision you've made before?" Cinderpaw mewed softly. Her paws grazed his wound site again, like a subconscious action of rechecking the quality of her work while her thoughts wandered far away.

Fireheart paused. There was a faint rustle in the bushes, and Fireheart's head whipped in that direction. He thought he caught sight of a familiar sandy-coloured pelt, but it vanished before he could confirm the thought. "I..."

Sandstorm turned away, tail accidentally brushing the bushes and causing a slight rustle. But she didn't care. Instead, she continued walking dejectedly away. She didn't need to hear his response, it didn't matter. Besides, it looked like Cinderpaw had it covered - she was his shoulder to lie on where Sandstorm failed. *Before, I let my emotions overcome me. And now... I'm too late.*

Fireheart cleared his throat, his gaze returning back to Cinderpaw's. Her pale blue eyes pierced right into him. He thought about Spottedleaf, about Sandstorm, about decisions Bluestar, Dustpelt, and even Tigerclaw had to make. "Of course I have, Cinderpaw. Who hasn't?"

"Do you think those with evil intentions will meet justice in the end?"

Concern overshadowed Fireheart's eyes. "Of course, Cinderpaw. What makes you think that?"

Cinderpaw shook her head. She lay down, curling into a small ball of fur. "I've just had a lot to think about, Fireheart. Ever since... *this*." Her pale blue eyes seemed to brim with sadness - a grief Fireheart could not and will not ever understand.

Fireheart stood, crossing the distance between them. Then he lay down beside her, flopped on his back and staring at the stars. "Cinderpaw, we don't get to choose what happens to us - fair or unfair. We don't get to control what happens in life, and we can't linger on what *has* happened." He sighed, looking over at her. "I believe what happened to you was unjustifiable, something undeserving for you. But it still happened. I believe that this obstacle should not be the one to knock you over - it is not something you are defined by. One day, you're going to become one of those great warriors in StarClan, watching over future ThunderClan members and being passed on throughout history among the Clans." At this, he pointed up at the sky with his paw.

"And that's not the end of it. Your kindness, your compassion, will be well-known throughout. Your courage, your strong spirit, will carry on. Your injury will not define your identity, but rather be accepted and revered among others, as we can see all that life has planned for you and what you made your life become - even after this hard period."

Cinderpaw turned towards him then, eyes shining with hope. "Do you really think all that of me?"

"I do, Cinderpaw. And not just me - everyone else does, too.

Everyone else will come to see your value, Cinderpaw. Because you are a special cat. Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise."

Right then and there, Cinderpaw's blue eyes gazing into Fireheart's, she knew that she never wanted to lose this cat in her life. She knew that she mustn't let his life fall prey to Tigerclaw, either. A bright light like his must not be diminished, in her life and others.

And in Fireheart's eyes, he saw a young cat maturing to become something more than others would ever see. He saw her as she was, a scared apprentice afraid of the future - carrying burdens others will never understand, because no one goes through the same things another does. Leaning over, he pressed his forehead against hers. "I will not pretend to understand your pain or what you've been through, but I can promise you this." He opened his eyes and stared deep into hers. "I will be with you throughout all this, Cinderpaw."

Cinderpaw closed her eyes, whispering, "Thank you, Fireheart. That means so much to me."

***

Yellowfang stumbled out of Mothermouth, head whirling. She muttered incoherently, with two words in particular standing out - "*Kill, kill.*" Over and over. Images whirled through her mind - her head felt like a rock, ready to fall over. But she pushed herself forward. She needed to go back to ThunderClan. She needed to warn them.

Crossing the final leg over WindClan territory, her vision almost blacked out by her exhaustion. Darkness covered her path, rendering her eyesight useless even as she closed her eyelids in exhaustion. She relied on scents to guide her. A whiff of ThunderClan scent crossed her path. Adrenaline pushed her forward. *I'm almost there.*

A body barrelled into hers. She cried out in pain, feeling her joints cry out in protest. Her body gathered up its remaining energy to fend off the attacker. Yowling, she swiped at the dark furred cat, her claws snagging at the cat's fur. It was damp - the cat had tried to wash its scent off. In fact, it stank faintly of mud, too. The cat

swiped at hers, and at some point in the fight she realised that the cat was starting to aim at her throat.

Fury rose in her, propelling her to react faster. She flinched away from a bite meant to snap her neck. Yellowfang snarled, "Who are you?"

ThunderClan scents enveloped her, and faintly she caught a whiff of the scent - but she was too muddled to figure it out in the middle of her tiredness and the fight.

The cat's eyes narrowed. '*Kill her, and I will spare you'.* The memory flickered through the cat's mind. The cat lunged. This time, Yellowfang went down with the cat. She rolled them over, using her bigger size as an advantage. Her claws dug deep into the cat's pelt as she held the cat down. "Who are you?" she hissed again, voice sharper and eyes narrowing. Her slow thoughts clicked together. *This is a ThunderClan member.* "Why are you doing this?"

A deep male voice responded, hissing and out of breath, "I can't go back, Yellowfang."

A pause. Yellowfang hissed, almost shaking him out of frustration to continue what he was saying.

"It's your life or mine."

Author's Note:
Hey, to those who managed to find my story again after these past few months.
Hi, to those who just found this story.
And hello, to those coming here for the fun of reading - or just to escape from reality :')

These past few months have been a blur, what with so many things happening around the world and I believe in each and everyone's lives. I hope everyone is staying safe, and I hope all of you are well :) I'm truly sorry for my inactiveness. I've been so busy over these couple of months away, I realise I've forgotten the essence and somewhat magic of writing and the reason why I started writing in the first place. I believe approximately a month ago I posted that I

have not given up on this story, and at long last I've tried picking up the strings of where I left off to complete this chapter I had originally started months ago.

Let me know how you feel about this chapter <3 would you like more scenes of fireheart and cinderpaw?

I'm still figuring out on how to adjust to this 'new normal', and I'm also very much unsure of the future. However, I have found my place of trust, and I hope everyone has found the peace they need, too.

Stay safe & stay strong :)
~Jayhow

14

A ragged dark gray she-cat stumbled into ThunderClan camp right as the sun's rays touched the horizon, illuminating the sky in a brilliant light, streaked with pink and purple. The she-cat's flattened face turned towards the light, yellow eyes blinking in appreciation in seeing the light of day.

"Yellowfang!" Cinderpaw cried out, limping out of the medicine den towards the she-cat just as Yellowfang collapsed, the words "kill" dying on her lips. Tigerclaw rose from his position under Highrock, ears pricked forward in calm interest.

Sandstorm poked her head out of the warriors den, followed by others awoken by the commotion. She streaked across the camp, reaching Yellowfang's side. Her emerald eyes widened in shock as she took in the situation, the blood streaked along Yellowfang's flank still fresh. In fact, fresh blood bubbled up even as more cats gathered around.

Cinderpaw motioned for the crowd to step back, her worried eyes sweeping over the crowd. "Willowpelt, can you get some cobwebs? It's at the back of the medicine den." Next, her eyes landed on Graystripe. "Can you get horsetail? It's a tall plant, bristly stemmed." Graystripe and Willowpelt nodded, immediately running over to the medicine den.

Cinderpaw assessed Yellowfang's wounds more closely. A cat had obviously inflicted it on her - judging by the long claw marks running the length of her flank. Small marks made by the incisors of a cat stood out starkly on Yellowfang's right leg which was ripped. Many spots of Yellowfang's fur were missing. Her throat had marks where the attacker's teeth had almost sunk in, with small grazes by the side.

Cinderpaw's stomach constricted in fear as she wondered who was bold enough to do this to a medicine cat. A foreboding feeling came over her, and as her gaze slowly lifted, it connected with

Tigerclaw's. The question lingered in the air, but somehow she already knew the answer.

Willowpelt and Graystripe raced back to her side, breaking Cinderpaw's train of thought. Cinderpaw took the horsetail from Graystripe, chewing it into a poultice. She stuffed it into Yellowfang's wounds, wrapping the cobwebs around it to staunch the blood and keep the horsetail in place.

Cinderpaw rose slowly. "Carry Yellowfang back to the medicine den. I will continue to treat her there."

As three cats slowly lifted Yellowfang, Cinderpaw spun to meet Bluestar. The leader's blue eyes were glazed over, but blinked when Cinderpaw called her. "Bluestar, a cat attacked Yellowfang on her way back from Moonstone. I suggest scouting our territories-"

Bluestar focused her gaze on Cinderpaw. "A cat? Who would dare harm a medicine cat, especially one like Yellowfang?"

Cinderpaw opened her mouth, but Tigerclaw cut in, his broad form nudging Cinderpaw aside. "I will personally escort a patrol to scout our territory and see if there's an outsider," he informed Bluestar in a solemn tone. Then he turned to Cinderpaw, "I believe Yellowfang needs your attention now more than ever, Cinderpaw."

Cinderpaw hissed in annoyance, glaring outright at Tigerclaw. One look at Bluestar and she knew that she wouldn't listen to anything Cinderpaw says with Tigerclaw there. However, knowing what Tigerclaw said was true, she turned angrily away to rush to her mentor's side.

Sandstorm, watching the whole exchange, experiencing a sinking feeling. *What was Tigerclaw planning?*

A night passed.

Cinderpaw stumbled towards Fireheart, herbs hanging from her

jaws. "Cinderpaw?" Fireheart rushed forward to meet her, guiding her to his makeshift nest. "What's wrong?"

Cinderpaw dropped the herbs, grateful for his warmth on this cold night. She sat down, head whirling in exhaustion. "Yellowfang came back yesterday, wounded. I was taking care of her the whole day. I... I think she was attacked by one of Tigerclaw's followers." She shook her head, trying to shake away the exhaustion clinging to her. "I think it's part of Tigerclaw's plan. I just can't figure out what yet."

Fireheart's eyes widened. Cinderpaw glanced up quickly, worried. "I'm sorry, I just... he's not a cat to be trusted. And I understand if you don't think so, he's a great warrior. I just-"

"No, Cinderpaw. I've always suspected it. It's just that I didn't know you felt the same way."

Cinderpaw shook her head. She lay down, body trembling in shock. "He's done too many things, Fireheart..." Her voice trailed off as she drifted into sleep, worry still etched on her face. Fireheart lay down beside her, curling his tail around her frail body, keeping her warm.

"Don't worry, Cinderpaw. I'll protect you." he murmured.

***

Rumours flew around the Clan as word got out that there were no intruders found on the territory. There was even a possibility that someone from their Clan had attacked Yellowfang. Halftail was shaking his head, whispering with Patchpelt about how the Clan had changed in a matter of months under Tigerclaw's control.

Everyone rose to their paws in anticipation as Bluestar climbed onto Highrock, addressing the Clan. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting." Everyone sat impatiently underneath, flicking their tails while waiting to hear what she says. "I know everyone's worried about who attacked Yellowfang, but I wish to assure everyone that the attacker *will* be caught." Bluestar cleared her throat, confidence waning a little. Tigerclaw stepped forward from the crowd.

"Bluestar, don't you think it's a little suspicious how Yellowfang was attacked while Fireheart was exiled?" Tigerclaw mewed, voice reverberating around the camp as everyone fell into silence.

Bluestar narrowed her eyes. "What are you implying?"

"I mean, it's not strange that a kittypet like Fireheart - especially one who may not be able to withstand the shame of being exiled - would have no sense of boundaries or stay loyal to the warrior code."

Sandstorm hissed, jumping to his paws in defiance. "Are you saying Fireheart would attack Yellowfang?"

Tigerclaw turned his calm gaze on Sandstorm. "I'm merely suggesting, Sandstorm."

"And how about Darkstripe? Your oh-so-loyal friend? I don't see *him* here. In fact, I haven't seem him since Yellowfang came back." She snapped back, fur rising.

A murmur of agreement spread over the crowd. Dustpelt stood beside Sandstorm now, nodding in agreement. "Can you explain Darkstripe's disappearance?"

Tigerclaw snarled, "I cannot be responsible for where a cat wanders. Stop throwing false accusations around before you have *evidence*. And right now, Yellowfang's injured state surely points towards Fireheart. Actions like this are only capable of someone exiled, not someone born and raised in ThunderClan. Of course Fireheart wouldn't have the same loyalty as Darkstripe."

Yowls of agreement and defiance rose to meet this statement, however Bluestar silenced it with a sweep of her tail. "Again, we wait for Yellowfang to awake. No accusations shall be made until we hear from Yellowfang. Meeting dismissed."

She jumped down from Highrock, retreating back to her den. Tigerclaw's head swiveled in Sandstorm and Dustpelt's direction. Dustpelt flinched, but Sandstorm bared her teeth at Tigerclaw, daring him to come near. He narrowed his eyes in warning, then

stood and left the camp.

Again, warnings flitted through Sandstorm's mind. *What was Tigerclaw planning?*

15

Yellowfang tossed and turned in her nest, muttering in her sleep. Cinderpaw, bent over the old medicine cat, worriedly tried to decipher what she was trying to say. "Kill, kill," Yellowfang murmured. "Pack, pack."

Cinderpaw shuddered. "Yellowfang, what are you trying to say?"

Suddenly the old medicine cat's yellow eyes snapped open. "Where's Bluestar?" her voice croaked.

Cinderpaw, stunned at the sudden awakening of her mentor, quickly rose to her paws. "I'll get her, Yellowfang." She rushed out of the den and headed for the leader's den. "Bluestar?" she called as she approached the den.

Bluestar stuck her head out of the shadows of her den. "Yes, Cinderpaw? Has Yellowfang awoken yet?"

"Yes, and she's asking for you." Cinderpaw dipped her head in greeting.

Bluestar's eyes flicked immediately towards the medicine den. Yellowfang, apparently unable to wait for Bluestar's arrival, stepped out. "Bluestar... I've received a prophecy. ThunderClan is in danger." Her eyes roamed the Clan, landing at last on Tigerclaw.

Sandstorm followed Yellowfang's line of vision, shivering as she realised it was trained on Tigerclaw. With a sudden resolve, she stood. *We need Fireheart back.* I *need Fireheart back. Only he can save the Clan.*

As Cinderpaw and Bluestar conversed with Yellowfang, worry evident in their eyes and nervous movements, Sandstorm slipped out of camp.

Fireheart, picking at a mouse worriedly, looked up in surprise when he caught scent of a familiar she-cat. "Sandstorm?"

Sandstorm barged through the underbrush. Fur bristling, she whisked her tail in impatience and worry. "Fireheart, ThunderClan needs your help. Tigerclaw-"

Immediately, Fireheart rushed to her side, green eyes wide. "What has he done?"

Sandstorm shook her head, breath coming out in puffs. "Nothing yet. But Yellowfang keeps telling about a prophecy that I think is related to him. He will bring ThunderClan into ruins, Fireheart." Sandstorm paused, eyes locking with him. "Save us."

Fireheart nodded firmly, eyes hardening. Together, Sandstorm and Fireheart raced back to the ThunderClan camp, praying that it was not too late.

***

Darkstripe smirked, paws covered with the blood of a young rabbit. *Tigerclaw will be pleased. It will be a redemption to my previously failed task.* As he thought about that night fighting Yellowfang and the day after when Tigerclaw came searching for him, anger palpable in his eyes because Yellowfang had returned back to camp, he cringed.

Swallowing, he continued to smear the rabbit's tracks along a path to the camp. *I mustn't let him down.* Darkstripe flicked his tail, satisfied with his task, then raced ahead to where the Twolegs let their beasts wander.

***

Tigerclaw, back at camp, headed over to Dustpelt. Revenge glimmered in his eyes as he laid down a mouse he had picked up from the fresh-kill pile. "Share?" He mewed, paws nudging the mouse in Dustpelt's direction.

Dustpelt narrowed his eyes. "What do you want, Tigerclaw?"

"Oh nothing, just to say a little thank you for all your help prior."

Tigerclaw's lips curled almost into a happy expression, waiting for a response. Dustpelt eyed him, then nodded cautiously, sitting down.

"Look, the sunlight reaches that area - shall we move over there?" Tigerclaw pointed with his tail towards a patch of dying sunlight, and Dustpelt obligingly moved over there. As Dustpelt ate the mouse, Tigerclaw sat back and watched the sky. Brilliant streaks of pink and yellow painted the baby blue sky, clouds drifting overhead, chased by the strong wind currently drifting through the camp.

Cats milled about in worry, but Tigerclaw sat there in calmness, glee building in him with every moment that passed. When Dustpelt looked up to ask if Tigerclaw wanted some of the mouse, Tigerclaw shook his head almost politely, telling him that he could finish off the mouse. His head lifted, eyes trained straight ahead - right at the entrance to the camp.

A perfect path. Straight to him.

AN:

Hey guys! Hope you enjoyed this chapter, please give me feedback on how you think I can improve / whether you want me to add more scenes between whichever cats...

Life has been so busy, I may not update as often but I promise you, once again, that I will not abandon this book. It just takes me more time to write out a chapter nowadays because of lack of motivation and/or tons of studies I need to get to:// (on that note, what do you guys think of the word 'productiveness' and what do you do to stay productive / how do you study?)

stay safe, stay strong.

s ee you guys soon!

~ Jayhow

16

Fireheart's heart pounded hard, adrenaline coursing through his veins as he sprinted towards ThunderClan camp, wishing all the while that he had not strayed so far in despair from being exiled. Sandstorm kept pace with him, her golden pelt a flash in the corner of his eye - sprinting ahead as she caught sight of a red splotch of blood.

Skidding to a stop, Sandstorm and Fireheart sniffed the splotch of blood. *Rabbits?* Fireheart looked up at Sandstorm worriedly. "Why would any ThunderClan cat waste fresh-kill?"

Sandstorm shook her head, eyes darkening in anger. "I don't think we did it, Fireheart."

A snarl sounded from the undergrowth nearby. Fireheart turned, a movement on his right - seen from his peripheral vision, causing him to turn in defense. The black cat barrelled right into him as it lunged, claws outstretched to snap his neck.

Sandstorm hissed in fury, launching on top of the black cat choking Fireheart down. Together, they rolled down the slight incline of the hill they were on, fur bristling and claws lashing as they tried to get the upperhand of each other. Sandstorm's claws sliced deep through the cat's pelt, leaving marks that immediately welled up with bright crimson blood.

Fireheart, gauging the time and distance, launched from his attack position just as the black cat flipped Sandstorm over. His claws dug into the cat's shoulder as he heaved the cat backwards - causing him to unbalance. Quickly, Fireheart dug his claws near the cat's throat in warning. His eyes narrowed when he saw who it was.

"Darkstripe?" Sandstorm snarled, emerald eyes narrowing in sharp hatred. "What are you doing here? What's all this?"

Darkstripe's lips curled in both distaste and yet... pleasure. His eyes

glinted with the knowledge that he had the upper hand, and that he still won even if he were to die. Fireheart squeezed his throat tighter, causing him to wheeze and choke while Sandstorm felt like strangling him there and then, impatient to hear his response. "Listen..." was all he gasped between gasps of air.

Rhythmic pounding on the ground made the two cats look up in alarm, fur standing on end, bristling as four-legged beasts rounded a corner sending dust up with their momentum. Fireheart leaped back from Darkstripe in alarm, beckoning Sandstorm to leave, back towards camp.

Rearing out of their path, Sandstorm and Fireheart were quick to avoid the beasts' trampling paws - leaving Darkstripe in their path. He could barely lift his head, still gasping for air, when the first beast reached him. With an angry growl, its jaw salivating from the scent of rabbits still permuting the air, it closed its teeth around the easy prey and tossed it away, out of sight. Barking, the dog beckoned for the rest to follow as they continued their way straight towards ThunderClan camp.

Fireheart's heart ran at triple the speed, his legs fervently trying to keep up with the panic surging through his veins. When they reached the camp, cats were in brawls with the beasts - around three for every dog there was. At the sight of Dustpelt laying strewn across the camp, Sandstorm gave a worried yelp and rushed to his side to protect him.

Fireheart was about to follow when he heard a panicked yelp from the medicine cat den. *Cinderpaw!* Alarm ringing in his mind, he raced towards the medicine cat den, ducking past the ferns and skidding to a stop behind a huge dog sniffing its surroundings.

Yellowfang, claw marks scratched across her pelt, lay panting in the corner, her eyes dim with exhaustion. Cinderpaw lay in a helpless bundle by the side, the claws on her broken leg evidence of her fight against the dog but failing to win. "Fireheart!" she cried at the sight of him, relief pouring over her but at the same time fear for him overcoming her. "Don't come any closer."

The dog swept its gaze around the den once more, sensing the fear

pulsing from the injured or sick cats. Protectiveness rose inside Fireheart. Giving a caterwaul, he leaped onto the dog's back, piercing its fur and digging his claws into its shoulder. The dog reared back, throwing him off. Fireheart landed on the ground, and hissed to grab its attention. Its eyes lit with fury, and followed Fireheart out of the den and into broad daylight.

Bluestar raced over to help him as he fended off the beast's blows. "I'm glad you came back, Fireheart." Bluestar commented between jabs. Fireheart grunted his acknowledgement, avoiding the dog's large swipes.

Just then, a loud yowl rang through the camp. Fireheart's attention was diverted for just a second as he spun around, heart thudding in fear that it was Sandstorm.

Dustpelt lay crouched near Brindleface's limp body, his head turned upward to the sky, face frozen in a look of anguish.

17

Fireheart felt teeth piercing through his soft flesh, and he hissed in pain as he tried not to move when he was lifted off of the ground to reduce the possibility of the beast's teeth tearing into his vital organs. The beast's hot breath ruffled his pelt as it raised its paw, claws glinting in the sunlight, about to lash into his throat.

"Fireheart!"

His head spun, claws swiping uselessly through the air. Momentarily, his gaze collided with Cinderpaw's crystal blue eyes - ones that sparkled with fear. "Cinderpaw, no-"

The young apprentice tried leaping; pain flitted across her features as she landed clumsily on the beast's pelt, the height of her leap hindered by her leg. The beast barked furiously, dropping Fireheart like dead weight. Wincing, Fireheart spun around to attack the beast again - Cinderpaw had been thrown off by the bucking dog and in a swipe was flung into the undergrowth nearby. Heart thudding with terror, Fireheart gave a loud caterwaul and flung himself at the beast. A blur of pelts nearby told him others had come to support him, and quickly the beast was driven out of the camp.

Head whirring now, exhaustion tugging in Fireheart's limbs, he limped towards Cinderpaw. "Cinderpaw?" He whispered, terror dripping in his voice. The gray pelt lay limp on the side of the clearing. "Cinderpaw," he repeated again, a little louder. The body stayed motionless.

"Fireheart!" Bluestar's commanding yowl broke through Fireheart's cloud of horror, just as he reached Cinderpaw's side. Her flank rose slightly. Relief crashed over him.

Fireheart's head whipped up to meet Bluestar's striking gaze. "We need to get these dogs out of here," she hissed. His mind caught on, and in a panic he tried coming up with ways to drive them out. In a

wave, yowls and hisses crashed his senses. Sandstorm bounded up, her flanks heaving and dripping with blood.

"Let's lead them to the cliff." Sandstorm suggested, her green eyes flickering with panic.

Fireheart looked at Bluestar for confirmation. She nodded.

***

The aftermath was a mess. Bodies of cats were strewn around the camp, but to Fireheart's relief after a quick glance around, all were breathing - except Brindleface. Dustpelt still crouched over his sister's body, too sorrowful to fix his wounds. *Too much has happened.*

Bluestar's own limp body lay nearby, still wet from being washed ashore. Fireheart's heart wrenched a little as he gazed at her familiar pelt. Sandstorm brushed against him, her eyes imploring as she searched his gaze. "Fireheart?" She whispered, tail curling around his.

Fireheart drew his gaze away, exhaustion and sadness pressing down on him. "Give me a moment, Sandstorm. I-I need to check on Cinderpaw," he moved away, and her warmth disappeared - leaving him feeling a chilly cold.

Brushing past the fern covering leading to the medicine den, Fireheart's heart thumped with worry when he saw Yellowfang crouched over Cinderpaw, eyes laced with an emotion he didn't recognise. "Yellowfang?" Fireheart whispered. "How is she?"

It was as though Yellowfang couldn't hear him. Her paw moved sluggishly, pressing a bunch of herbs against Cinderpaw's flank. Blocking the blood. Blocking the worst of it.

Fireheart's heart twisted. It was as though a giant fist had wrapped around it- squeezing, twisting, making it hard to breathe. "Cinderpaw?" He croaked. The own sting of his wounds faded in the background as he stumbled over to the limp gray body. "Cinderpaw," he whispered again, sorrow flooding his body at the

unnatural silence enveloping the tiny apprentice.

He stood that way for a while, head bent over the apprentice's body. Other cats littered the floor of the medicine den, chests heaving, blood stemmed by leaves forcefully pressed against their flanks. But all Fireheart could see was Cinderpaw's body. Her eyes, closed in blissful sleep. Her paws, soft and delicate - valiant in battle just hours before.

Fireheart moved to lie down beside her, keep her warm even as the night's chill crept into the den. But Yellowfang moved then- her claws glinted in the pale moonlight filtering into the medicine cat's den, a warning as she swiped at his leg. "You caused this, Fireheart," she hissed in a low, dangerous tone.

Fireheart's head swam. He couldn't comprehend her words. "What?" He heard himself meow, dumbly.

"If she hadn't loved you so much, do you think she would have gotten this hurt?" Yellowfang's tail brushed against the herbs she had stuffed so desperately against Cinderpaw's flank, revealing the deep gashes raked across the cat. Crimson red still welled up where the herbs had just been seconds before.

Each word stung like a bee. Fireheart's head suddenly stopped swimming. *She loved me?*

Yellowfang's eyes burned into him like lasers, accusation laced in her voice, "Well?"

Fireheart's tongue caught. Words didn't form.

Yellowfang snarled a blood curdling yowl before pushing him away, recognising the look in Fireheart's eyes. The look of disbelief - not wanting to accept it, because he didn't know how to deal with it. "Coward."

Cinderpaw stirred. *Coward.*

A weak gasp. "Fireheart," she whispered.

Coward.

Fireheart couldn't get past the knot in his throat. He tried swallowing, but it didn't work. The lump persistently stayed there.

Yellowfang bent protectively over Cinderpaw's body, pressing a wad of moss dripping with water to the apprentice's mouth. Without looking up, Yellowfang delivered a simple but piercing statement that drove Fireheart out of the den, head hanging shamefully: "Get away from her, Fireheart, before you hurt her again."

Sandstorm met him outside, worried eyes belying her calm exterior.

Fireheart shook her off. He needed air. He needed...

Memories of the night he'd met Tigerclaw and Darkstripe flashed through his mind. Darkstripe's snicker rang in his mind;*"Why do you think Cinderpaw went to the thunderpath that day? To please you, of course. It's your fault she ended up this way."* And he'd done it again.

Hatred built up in Fireheart. It coiled like a black snake in his stomach, filling his body and climbing its way up to his heart - the throne of emotions.

He needed to see Tigerclaw.

Author's Note:

Hi guys!

Wew, it's 2022. Firstly, happy new year! I hope you're staying safe & are at peace and happiness. Even if you aren't quite where you want to be at the moment, I'm grateful you're here and I hope you don't give up on your dreams. They're worth it, and so are you.

I never thought I would take this long to update this story; if you're still here it means the world to me :). I haven't had the chance to reply to comments as I used to- I haven't logged in a while, I admit. Wattpad has always been a source of happiness for me - but life got in the way the past two years. Responsibilities stepped in. I'll be uploading the chapters consecutively in the next few days and finish this story once and for all. My apologies for this long wait, guys.

Btw, I know the story doesn't really line up with the original series - Tigerclaw is meant to be leader of ShadowClan at this moment in time, however I wanted to make it more of an inside twist.

Have a brilliant day, and I'm wishing everyone a blessed new year! May you accomplish all that you wish to in 2022~ <3

18

Tigerclaw's mouth lifted at its corner, sly and humorless. A pelt the colour of a burning flame flashed between the trees surrounding him.

Little *crunches* as twigs snapped under the paws of the orange cat sounded through the still air. It was the whole forest was holding its breath in anticipation for the battle.

Tigerclaw sat on a crown of leaves and twigs, silhouetted by the moonlight rising behind him. His brown fur turned a hideous black in the shadows left untouched by the moon's light.

Hatred, culminating ever since he left the medicine den, spilled over in bountiful buckets now. It drove Fireheart forward, out of the shadows and into the ring of moonlight in the clearing.

Tigerclaw, sitting just at the edge of the ring of light, stretched leisurely in the shadows; his claws menacingly reflected the moonlight where it entered the circle. A purr. "Fireheart. What a pleasure to have you find me."

Fireheart's tail flicked to one side irritably. "Cut your mousedung, Tigerclaw. You betrayed your Clan. You're a traitor." He spat the last word out in disgust, lips curled back in a snarl.

Tigerclaw took one step into the circle, tail twitching in amusement. "I needed to get rid of the slaggers of the Clan, Fireheart. The incompetent, the wounded, the *cowards*."

Fireheart flinched.

"Although, it does seem like you've done a pretty good job of that by yourself." Tigerclaw pressed, grinning. Fireheart wanted to wipe that smirk off his furry face. "It almost makes me applaud you, Fireheart. Single-handedly dealing with a she-cat without lifting a paw."

The tabby cat's last words drawled out lazily, mockingly. Fireheart didn't move. "I'm not going to fall for your tricks, Tigerclaw."

"Tricks? No, Fireheart. The *truth*." Tigerclaw paused just as his face met the light, turning his head up as though savoring its healing touch. His eyes closed like he was in bliss. "So, why *did* you come here if you're so smart? Affected by my words? My actions? We all know I'm the better warrior-"

"When will you stop?" Fireheart whispered. In the still night, the words were sharp and clear.

Tigerclaw's eyes blinked open in mock surprise, "Stop what?"

Fireheart lunged at him, claws outstretched. Tigerclaw fell backwards, letting his weight bring him down; with a snarl, his hind legs kicked Fireheart off even as Fireheart tried aiming for his neck. Fireheart landed with a heavy *thump* on the edge of the ring, feeling pain ricochet up his body from the previous wounds inflicted by the dogs.

Tigerclaw was up in a flash, pouncing onto Fireheart and swinging his paw upwards. Claws unsheathed, he swiped down to scar Fireheart's cheek - again, and again. Fireheart grunted under the older warrior's large weight, trying to knock him off balance. "ThunderClan will never accept you back," he hissed, rolling over - it exposed his tummy, but effectively made Tigerclaw unbalanced, losing his grip.

Tigerclaw crouched, eyes calculating while he let out a soft purr. "ThunderClan does not deserve me. Not with the foolish cats the Clan is being plagued by."

After gathering his bearings, Fireheart pounced again, aiming for his chest. Tigerclaw accommodated the pounce, meeting him mid-air and swinging his lower body so his hind legs hooked into Fireheart's soft belly. Digging in, Tigerclaw ripped through the fur and skin. Fireheart yowled in pain, paws wrapped tightly around Tigerclaw's head as he tried raking the warrior's ear and cheek. Falling onto the ground, the two cats twisted about in the middle of the circle, fur flying as they scraped each other in a valiant attempt

to overpower one another.

Fireheart's belly burned from the scratches. In a flailing moment, he fell back from the larger tom, catching his breath.

Tigerclaw snarled, not without scars of his own - a torn ear, scratched flank, and bitemarks on his legs. "You're getting more annoying by the second, fleabag," he snapped.

Fireheart managed to give a smirk. "I'm not going anywhere."

Tigerclaw hissed. "Brash confidence, for a losing cat."

They went at each other again; Fireheart could feel his energy slipping from him- he'd lost too much blood already. With one swipe, Tigerclaw knocked Fireheart to the side, landing in the darkest part of the clearing. Fireheart couldn't move. Everywhere hurt.

Tigerclaw's eyes glinted evilly, roaming the shadows. "You can't hide forever, Fireheart."

Fireheart sank deeper into the forest floor, willing himself to be smaller even as his exposed flanks shivered in the cold. Tigerclaw padded closer, sniffing the air, drawing a claw through the dirt.

A tail length away.

Tigerclaw hissed.

A mouse-breadth away.

Fireheart lashed out, but Tigerclaw stopped him in a receiving blow. Tigerclaw's hot breath breathed down his neck, whispering the words "I almost forgot to ask you, who do you think caused Cinderpaw's injury that day?"

Fireheart snarled weakly. Tigerclaw laid his paw against Fireheart's throat, pushing his face deeper into the ground. Fireheart gasped; his windpipe was being blocked off - he could barely breathe. "*Coward."* Tigerclaw snarled in his face as he raised his paw for the final blow.

A body barrelled into him from the side, knocking him off by surprise. Fireheart coughed, released from the hold. He choked in deep breaths of air gratefully.

Dustpelt stood over Tigerclaw's body, pinning the great warrior down with his paws while his teeth sank into Tigerclaw's shoulder. With a sharp pop, Tigerclaw's shoulder was moved into an awkward angle by Dustpelt's determined bite. Spitting the tom's blood out of his mouth, Dustpelt glared in disgust at Tigerclaw's face. "You killed my sister. I'm going to kill you too."

"Wait," Fireheart murmured from the side. "We should not kill another warrior. It's... it's not right."

Dustpelt's eyes flashed with anger. "Warrior? This is no warrior, Fireheart. He broke the warrior code more times than this." Tigerclaw was still lying on the ground in pain, the wounds inflicted by Fireheart illuminated by the moonlight. Blood bubbled from them. Fireheart felt a stab of satisfaction at the sight of the cat's hurt, of getting back at him for Cinderpaw. But this was enough.

"We don't have to be as bad as him," Fireheart tried.

Dustpelt's lips curved back. "He never gave Brindleface a second thought."

Fireheart shook his head. Trees were starting to fly in his vision. There were two Dustpelt's now, glaring at him. "I don't want to see another death today, Dustpelt. Do you?"

Brindleface's body flashed across Dustpelt's memory. Fireheart could see the depth of his hurt, his sadness, in his eyes. In that relenting moment, Tigerclaw managed to struggle to his paws. Dustpelt aimed one last well aimed shot at his ear, tearing the one Fireheart hadn't to shreds. Tigerclaw yowled. "Leave now and never come back," Dustpelt snapped.

With one menacing glare at Dustpelt and then Fireheart, Tigerclaw limped away from the clearing. Fireheart guessed the tabby tom knew not to instigate Dustpelt any further, and that he was being

given a rare chance to live.

Dustpelt turned to Fireheart then. His eyes bore into Fireheart. "Don't make me regret this decision, Fireheart."

Fireheart shook his head. "Whatever happens, we'll face it together as a Clan."

Dustpelt scoffed. "A kittypet mindset. I wonder what Sandstorm sees in you."

Fireheart turned away at the mention of the she-cat he'd nearly forgotten. *Sandstorm.* "I wonder what *anyone* sees in me."

As he left the clearing, two pairs of eyes floated before his eyes - one a bright set of emerald green, another the piercing blue of crystal gems.

AN:

I literally looked up a video for cats fighting; they move so fast it was hard for me to write out cool battle moves - but the swing of Tigerclaw in mid-air was inspired by one of those real-life cats that were fighting. I thought that was really cool ahah.

I'm glad Dustpelt (in this story) got to exact his revenge on Tigerclaw. I feel like he deserved that after his sister's unnecessary death in the books :((please don't come at me for not killing off Tigerclaw XD)

Alsoo we're nearing the end! (I'll probably end the story in the next chapter :() Who do you guys wish Fireheart to end up with?

19

[image]

Dawn arrived. The Clan stirred, remnants of the battle still obviously strewn about the site.

Patrols gathered - those not as hurt being sent to hunt for fresh-kill, herbs, and to check if the dogs were truly gone.

Fireheart's heart was heavy as he padded out of the warriors den. Undoubtedly, his injuries had been one of the worst - but besides the biting pain shooting up his leg, the death of Bluestar and the horrible state Cinderpaw was in pressed down on him.

"Fireheart!"

He looked up to see Sandstorm waving him over from her spot next to a fallen tree. Padding over, he plopped himself down beside her with a sigh. "Sandstorm," he greeted, none too joyously.

"Why the long face?" Sandstorm tried joking, nudging him using her shoulder.

Fireheart looked at her as though she'd grown two heads, and waved his tail around the camp. "You think?"

Sandstorm sighed. "I know, I was just trying to make the mood lighter."

Fireheart blinked. "Oh."

Silence ensued.

"Fireheart," Sandstorm started. She paused. "I know... I know it's not the right time to ask this but..." Fireheart glanced at her curiously.

"Do you like Cinderpaw?" She blurted it out, instantly closing her mouth after and looking at him in alarm but slight hope.

Fireheart blinked again. "Why would you ask that?"

Sandstorm turned her head away, paws shuffling together uncomfortably. "I saw both of you - that time when you were exiled. I just thought maybe you were angry at me, for not defending you at that time-" she quickly added as an explanation, but Fireheart cut her off.

"Sandstorm, I want you to know that I understand why you were mad at me. I admit, I wasn't being fair to you. But I have to make this clear; Spottedleaf is nothing but a friend to me, and... and..."

"And Cinderpaw?" Sandstorm whispered. "She's just your apprentice, right?"

"She's not mine anymore." Fireheart answered. Heaving a sigh, he placed his head onto his paws. "How did this end up here? I never thought of her in that way- she's just such a bright cat, always so eager to learn, and kind-hearted too."

Sandstorm cocked her head to the side, watching him. "But now?"

Fireheart shook her head after a long pause, "I don't think I can decide this right now. She's a medicine cat, and I was her mentor. She still has a lot to learn, a lot more cats to meet."

Sandstorm's tail brushed his. But he moved away, standing up with an apologetic look on his face. "And Sandstorm, I don't think we should be together right now. I think... we both need time to think, alone."

Sandstorm watched the orange tom pad over to one of the patrols. Sadness swam in her eyes, before another cat crossed her line of vision, breaking her attention. "Hi, Dustpelt."

***

Cinderpelt stretched outside the medicine den, letting the sun warm her stiff, frozen limbs. Her wounds had healed well from the dog attack moons ago. "Morning, Cinderpelt!" Whitestorm greeted. The name rang happily in her ears; being a medicine cat felt great.

"Morning, Whitestorm!" She meowed back.

As she turned to retreat back into the cozy spots of her den, her eyes involuntarily searched for Firestar - now leader of the Clan. Her mind flashed back to when she had woken up and Firestar had visited her:

Cinderpaw greeted him cheerfully while digging into a morsel of mouse Yellowfang had brought her. But Fireheart's serious eyes broke the mood; speaking with a sad tone, he said, "I'm sorry for everything you've been through, Cinderpaw. Especially for me."

Cinderpaw looked down at her paws, pausing in eating. "I... I didn't do anything, Fireheart."

The tom crouched before her, eyes looking up into hers. "Don't say that, Cinderpaw. I'm so grateful for everything you've done. I was too late to help you, and for that I'm sorry. I will forever be sorry."

Cinderpaw shook her head, nudging him to his paws. "Please, stand Fireheart." She avoided his gaze.

"And... I know you like me, Cinderpaw." He said this slowly, delicately. Cinderpaw's eyes shot to his immediately. "I'm sorry for that too, Cinderpaw. Besides being against the warrior code, I think you're too young to decide who you like and who-"

"Don't say that," Cinderpaw snapped, eyes blazing with- hurt? Anger? Fireheart couldn't decide between those flickering emotions. "I like you because of who you are, Fireheart. Because of your purity, your good intentions for the rest of the Clan."

"I'm... honoured, Cinderpaw. But I truly think you need to grow a bit more, see the world-" Fireheart paused. Shook his head. "I can't be with you, Cinderpaw. Not right now."

"If I had been a warrior, would that have changed anything?" Cinderpelt asked, her eyes brimming with tears. "I knew it, I would never be good enough, you don't have to be sorry-"

"No, that's not it. Cinderpelt, you're a wonderful she-cat. And... I'm sure one day you would make someone very happy. But that cat isn't me. At

least not right now." Fireheart replied.

Cinderpaw looked away, sighing. Fireheart dipped his head apologetically. Then he left.

Now Firestar looked across the camp at her, eyes warm. Cinderpelt flicked her tail cheerfully. She tried to ignore the small sting of pain in her heart, but knew Firestar had made the right choice at that time. He'd been heavy with Clan burdens, and she was a medicine cat. She needed to learn how to help the Clan first before anything else.

But now...

Cinderpelt turned away. *Maybe next time.*

AN:

Video chosen above is dedicated to Sandstorm's broken feelings. And mine :')

I took the ship CinderpeltxFireheart into consideration - researched on what others think, etc. and honestly I've come up with the right words to what I feel about the ship: Cinderpelt was far too young for Fireheart to love at that time - to me it just felt awkward. But slowly as the story evolved and they grew older, we as readers saw their relationship develop into something more mature and deeper. Understanding. I think then their characters would be more suited to each other - hence the ending. (Do you guys want me to write a bonus scene for them? :3)

I didn't want Sandstorm to end up with Fireheart here because I just felt like Sandstorm still had so many insecurities and fights with Fireheart, she needed to solve her own problems first.

Pls I was struggling so hard between these two ships T_T I wrote two different endings for this book and in the end incorporated one scene into a totally different ending :')

Hope you enjoyed guys <3

~Jayhow

Author's Note

[image]

Figured it wouldn't be a Jayhow story without an author's note at the end;)

All jokes aside, I wanted to dedicate this chapter to you lovely readers - I hope this story took you along on its ride as much as it brought me the magic of leaving reality. Does that make sense? Sorry, I'm writing at 1 am...

Thank you for sticking along with my (very) late update schedules and I am always so delighted to see your reactions to specific scenes / characters; it's brought me so much joy :> Also, many many thanks to you guys' encouragement and positive / constructive feedback.

As always, I hope you enjoyed this! I hope you learned more about each cat's character - I certainly did, and it only made my appreciation for them grow so much more. Let me know if there is anything you thought / think needs improvement on:) Feedback is very appreciated!

If you haven't already, and only if you want to, check out my other Warrior fanfictions - Jayfeather & Half-Moon/Briarlight, and Firestar & Sandstorm/Spottedleaf.

(p.s. I also published a chapter on an original story 'Our Fantasy' - it plays a lot into culture and family so if you'd like to give that a read...)

Have a lovely rest of your day / night <3 Video up above is something I find very calming to listen to.

~Jayhow